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# WHO USES THE PUBLIC LIBRARY

A SURVEY OF THE PATRONS OF THE CIRCULATION  
AND REFERENCE DEPARTMENTS OF THE  
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

By  
WILLIAM CONVERSE HAYGOOD

*Fellow in the Graduate Library School  
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TO V. V. H.



## FOREWORD

### IN EXPLANATION—AND EXCULPATION

**W**HAT luck did that reader have? Did he get what he wanted in spite of librarian and catalogs? Some do. Did he fail because the thing he wanted couldn't be found in books? Some do. Did he know what he wanted? Did he fall back on the librarian when catalog, shelf list, and reference books failed? Did the machinery invented and developed by the librarian defeat its own ends because it is too elaborate or complicated? Would the reader fare better if turned loose among the books and permitted to run his own course? Would he conclude that the book he wanted or thought he wanted wasn't at hand merely because he didn't find it where he supposed it ought to be?

Queries like these have come to every librarian hundreds of times as he studied his reading room and wondered what brought his readers in, what success he had with them, why he failed, how he could improve his average, how he could get inside the reader's mind.

Trial and error is the first and earliest method of teaching anything. Its value is still recognized. But we all try to get away from it, to reduce the error part, to study the trial part for principles to help meet future developments. No one can ever hope for progress unless he has theories and opinions to guide him, but no one can ever hope for progress unless he has relentlessly checked and rechecked those theories and opinions against the cold, hard, healthy, workaday world.

Library statistics tell in detail how many books were handled, how many readers took books home or delved into them on reading-room tables, how many pieces of fiction or travel tales were drawn, how many card-holders were registered, how many this, that, and the other. But they find it no simple matter to say anything about the quality of this fiction, about the success of the journal of the expedition to the South Pole in giving the reader what he hoped to find. Perhaps statistics offer nothing but a quantity measure—useful and accurate and reliable, but calling for supplementary support when the intangibles are examined. Granting full value to the tangibles, how can we reach a proper rating for their shadowy but nonetheless significant sisters?

Some such ideas as these—partly clear-cut and sharply defined, partly misty and nebulous—lay behind two efforts the New York Public Library made in 1934 and 1936 to learn just what sorts and conditions of men made up its readers, just what foundations they brought to build on or backgrounds to paint on, which of their requests or hopes or demands were reasonable, and which were foreordained to failure, where library routine and machinery were helpful and when harmful.

The efforts were new, the results instructive. Just how many changes can or ought to be made as these results are studied and digested depends upon circumstances. Some conclusions are undoubtedly general in scope and universal in application. Others are with equal certainty limited to this or that part of the country or this or that sort of library.

It was primarily to study its own needs, to improve its own service, to help its own readers that these surveys were made by the New York Public Library. With the



hope that the effort and the results may help other libraries the story is here set forth. To the faithful staff that carried them through, to the understanding public that responded so appreciatively, to the kind friends who made possible the tabulation and digestion of the data secured, to the Dean of the Graduate Library School, and to the editor who has told the story so effectively, to the publishers who have set it forth so attractively the hearty thanks of all concerned are extended with sincere appreciation.

HARRY MILLER LYDENBERG

NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY



## PREFACE

THE contents of this volume are based on the results of a survey of its patrons made by the New York Public Library in January of 1936. The survey was initiated by the library and carried out by the staff of the Circulation and Reference Departments. The author's function has been to treat the accumulated materials in statistical fashion and to interpret them in a report to the Director. The original three-hundred-page assembly of graphs, tables, and explanatory text is on file in the library and can be consulted by anyone interested in the complete background.

This abstracted presentation undertakes the hazardous task of translating from one medium into another. Consciously ignoring the accepted idiom and convention of research, it endeavors to present the results of a complicated statistical study in familiar terms, without allowing the qualifications of the statistician to heckle the findings. To this end, tables, graphs, footnotes, and the like, are kept at a minimum, on the assumption that the reader will accept on faith the fact that the data have been treated with mathematical caution and care. The Bibliography at the end brings together the major studies and works cited in the body of the text, and in the Appendix will be found copies of the questionnaires used and notes on the methodology employed.

Since the writer's actual acquaintance with the problems and organization of the New York Public Library is limited to a few weeks' work as assistant in the 115th Street

branch and to two stimulating months as assistant in the Office of the Readers' Adviser, he would naturally be unprepared to offer recommendations or to draw rigid conclusions, even had the survey been made with that end in view. Such incidental observations as are given are made in the spirit of implicit belief in the educational mission of the American public library by a librarian who sees in the results of this study generalized implications for his chosen profession.

Grateful acknowledgement is made to several agencies and many individuals. The American Association for Adult Education, the Carnegie Corporation of New York, and the American Library Association contributed funds to implement the great amount of clerical and statistical work. Mr. Charles F. McCombs, Superintendent of the Reference Department of the New York Public Library, and his fellow-workers, with the aid of Dr. C. C. Williamson, Dean of the Columbia University School of Library Service, devised the questionnaire used in the Reference Department. The National Youth Administration of Chicago furnished a corps of clerical workers to expedite some of the mechanical labor. Miss Aubry Lee Hill, Librarian of the New Rochelle Public Library, generously allowed her institution to be used as a laboratory for a preliminary trial of the questionnaire. The faculty of the Graduate Library School, and Dr. Douglas Waples, in particular, helped to guide the study from the outset. The librarians of the several divisions of the Reference Department and of the forty-six branches, the Bronx Reference Center, the Music Library, Picture Collection, and the Columbia sub-branch of the Circulation Department, were more than co-operative. Miss Jennie M. Flexner, Readers' Adviser, Mr. Franklin F. Hopper, Chief of the Circulation Depart-

ment, Mr. Keyes D. Metcalf, Chief of the Reference Department, and Mr. Harry M. Lydenberg, Director, together with members of their staffs, helped in ways too many to enumerate. Lastly, thanks are due the twenty thousand citizens of New York City who gave the writer their library notes for editing.

W. C. H.

UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO  
February 1, 1938



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## CHAPTER I

### THE RELATION OF SOCIAL SURVEYS TO LIBRARY SCIENCE

IN 1933, when the committee of social scientists appointed by President Hoover issued its two-volume report on *Recent Social Trends in the United States*, librarians, as a professional group, received a rude but healthful jolt. Except for a few lines scattered incidentally throughout the fifteen hundred pages, no mention was made of an institution representing an investment of a billion or more dollars in taxpayers' money, and directly and indirectly influencing the habits and lives of millions of Americans.

Naturally there was a reaction in the profession. Men and women who had spent years in the intelligent work of supplying books to the bookless were indignant that their efforts had failed of official recognition, while the public school, recreation, social work, and public welfare agencies were subjected to intensive study and evaluation. To the credit of librarians let it be stated that although exclusion from the most important social document of the decade was generally deplored, the majority took the sober view and concluded that the library had taken humiliating but just treatment from the hands of the distinguished committee.

To those who have followed library literature over a period of years the committee's disregard was not an unqualified surprise. Rather it seemed a natural corollary of the willingness of the library to remain outside the main

currents of modern social investigation. For while definition before the law and the establishment of library schools by outstanding universities have assured professional status in the total meaning of the word, librarianship remains, nevertheless, a profession curiously lacking in the kind of documentation which is a source of strength to such a cognate field as education.

This lack of a factual professional literature was made all the more apparent when individual members of the President's Research Committee were later asked to explain the omission of the library from their report. To a man, they were quick to affirm their belief in and enthusiasm for the public library, but pointed out that it is an introverted institution which has not made itself capable of the type of analysis necessary to relate it to society in objective terms. No one will deny, they agreed, that libraries perform an essential public service, but, unlike the public school or public health organizations or even recreational agencies, the public library is inarticulate when it tries to define its place among the institutions which index a nation's level of culture. In brief, it lacks the facility of measurement; it can opine, but not define; it can inveigh, but cannot weigh; it can realize, but it cannot summarize.

The forces of historical development and professional temperament which have brought about this situation hold no longer. The pioneering days are ended. Standardization of techniques and the establishment of a workable methodology have, for the most part, been admirably and efficiently solved. Rapid physical expansion such as prevailed in the fabulous days of the Carnegie grants belongs to the past. And library schools are graduating each year more than enough qualified persons to keep the ranks of the profession filled and competent. Clearly, librarianship

has reached a stage in which it must draw on new vigors to sustain its forward momentum.

One of these lies in a general introspection of library work by librarians themselves—an objective reappraisal of the aims, ideals, and activities of library science to offset the empiricism of an elder day. Inevitably this process will result in a coral-like growth of proved fact on which will ultimately be erected an authentic library science, worthy to take its place among the other sciences of society.

There are, however, many librarians who resent with bitterness, and not without some justice, attempts to measure and analyze the effect of books and libraries on personality. They fear, often in a vague way, an invasion of those human relationships which give to librarianship its deeply satisfying spiritual and intellectual qualities. But while it is entirely possible to be in accord with the real concern underlying this attitude, one may at the same time deplore the inhibitions it places on the development of a genuine and valid professional philosophy. One has only to look at the relationship existing between student and teacher, or between physician and patient, to be assured that the scientific method in library science will in no way impair the personal relation of librarian to readers. Rather, if there is virtue in truth, it should result in a more sympathetic and enlightened approach to reading and the problems of the reader.

So much of library work is dependent on statistical description that it is queer that there should be antagonism toward attempts to push this method one step farther. Annual statistics of circulation, counts of the questions asked at reference desks, of books circulated for room use, of the number of people entering the building, etc., are all routine numerical devices in most libraries, which have

proved their practical value and which give the outside world a broad description of the library's activities.

However, our critics have pointed out that many of these measurements fall far short of giving an adequate picture of the social usefulness and meaning of the library. Reference statistics, for example, are gross and impersonal. Circulation figures tell little or nothing about the people who carry home the millions of books issued annually and so prevent any analysis which might show the influence of the mass reading which results. It is of small avail, say the critics, to be told that such a number of people asked such a number of questions at the reference desk, or that so many people read so many more books on the useful arts last year than they did ten years ago, unless we know who those people are. If most of them were students, it shows one thing about the particular library involved. If most of them were manual laborers or housewives or people on relief, it reveals other things about the library and about the society it serves.

In other words, while such records as the library keeps are, of course, highly essential for administrative purposes, they do not tell the curious outsider a lot about the library's real and ultimate influence in the community. Even worse, they may sometimes obscure these facts from the busy and detail-ridden librarian himself.

It was for the purpose of finding out in a quantitative way more about *homo legens* than the usual records and personal observation allow that the present study was undertaken.

Its original impulse arose while the Director of the New York Public Library was walking through the Main Reading Room one winter day. Outside, the sky was lowering and the wind was raw and wet; inside, the reading room



was crowded to capacity, and little bunches of people were coagulated around the delivery and information desks. The Director slipped into a wondering mood. What kind of people were these, he asked himself, who came to libraries on a day like this? A few, of course, were merely escaping the weather—the “library sitters”—but what about the others, the men and women intent over open volumes and sheets of notes? What urgency brought them here from every corner of the city? How well did the library fulfil their expectations?

Later, repeating his reflections to the Readers' Adviser and to other members of the staff, he found his curiosity shared. Together they planned an exploratory survey of readers, which, in January of 1934, was carried out in the Reference Department and in twelve branches of the Circulation Department. Since the findings of the tentative study were encouraging, the experiment was repeated two years later on an expanded scale, embracing every division of the Reference Department which was equipped to participate and all branches and one subbranch of the Circulation Department.

Twenty thousand adult library patrons co-operated in the study, which was carried on for a period of a week. The resulting blizzard of data was treated statistically and assembled into a report which was tendered the Director the following year. From that report the present study is drawn; and, in narrowing it down, a few simple questions which the survey attempted to answer are dealt with in the following chapters. These are: Who comes to the public library? What do readers do in the library? What brings them? How well satisfied are they? What contributes most to their dissatisfaction? Who uses the card catalog? How often do most readers visit the library? What

do they read outside its walls? What do they think of it as a public institution?

While no one connected with the survey would claim that definitive answers have been given to any of these questions, it is felt that responses of such a large number of library patrons will be suggestive as well as interesting to the profession at large.

There are many who will doubtless question the usefulness of a survey which has as its only immediate aim the gathering of social knowledge. To them we have tried to point out a few of the deficiencies of library science which seem amply to justify such procedure. There are others who will automatically discount the findings of a survey based on questionnaire responses. To them we can only point to the honorable history of surveys in all realms of social research and to certain internal indications which seem to be proof of the validity of the method.

The social survey as a means of fact-finding and fact-telling came into being in the latter part of the nineteenth century with the publication in England of William Booth's *In Darkest England and the Way Out*, and with the appearance in this country of Jacob Riis's study of New York's East Side, *How the Other Half Lives*. From these initial impressionistic studies the use of the social survey has grown in objectivity, has become more or less standardized in technique, and has won general recognition as a valuable instrument for obtaining social data.

As defined by Dr. Howard W. Odum,

the social survey may be said to be an objective quantitative approach to a study of the social process within a well-defined area at a given time, through one or more institutions, by means of a schedule and questionnaire; and the data thus assembled are treated statistically.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> H. W. Odum and Katharine Jocher, *An Introduction to Social Research* (New York: Holt, 1929), p. 246.

Surveys have been used as frequently and as effectively in library science as in any other field, but there have been appallingly few which can be justly termed "social" surveys or which have resulted in positive contributions to either practice or theory.

The earliest of the library surveys was reported by Solis-Cohen in the *Library Journal* for 1908<sup>2</sup>—a sympathetic and stimulating study of the library patrons of the Brooklyn Ghetto, which obviously owed much to the work of Jacob Riis. As late as 1924, Dr. Joseph Wheeler wrote that

as yet . . . there appears to be nothing in print in the way of a systematic general study of a community from the library point of view or of a library from the community point of view, although much has been done by many libraries for their own use. . . .<sup>3</sup>

Speaking before the Library Institute held at the University of Chicago in the summer of 1936, Dr. E. A. Wight concluded that the meager contribution of public library surveys is attributable to the fact that usually they have been highly subjective in character and that, even when their findings were valid, they too often received only a local reading.<sup>4</sup>

Since objectivity is the keynote of the social survey, those made for the purpose of solving local administrative problems or for achieving community programs—no matter how successful their outcome—cannot be regarded as social surveys in the sense in which the sociologist uses the term. Although since 1924 there have been surveys made

<sup>2</sup> L. M. Solis-Cohen, "Library Work in the Brooklyn Ghetto," *Library Journal*, XXXIII (1908), 485-88.

<sup>3</sup> J. L. Wheeler, *The Library and the Community* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1924), pp. 401-2.

<sup>4</sup> E. A. Wight, "Methods and Techniques of Library Surveys," in L. R. Wilson, ed., *Library Trends* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1937), pp. 344-60.

in accordance with the canons of sociology—most notably in Baltimore, Denver, South Chicago, and St. Louis—these have not received the wide hearing they deserved.

Of all researchers using the questionnaire method the skeptic asks: "How can you tell that you have reached the people you were trying to reach and not just a few who were willing to co-operate? And, were the same study repeated, how can you tell that your results would not be vastly different?"

Such skepticism is highly pertinent for, unlike the scientist who in his laboratory can suspend judgment until his experiments have been indefinitely repeated, we cannot sample and resample thousands of library patrons until we have reached incontrovertible conclusions. The best that we or any social researcher can hope to do is to make our method as foolproof as is humanly possible and, having done so, to regard our findings as a framework of concept and fact which future studies of a like nature will either confirm or deny. Social experimentation is costly, tedious, and time-consuming, but if properly carried out, its validity cannot be lightly set aside.

In the branches of the Circulation Department of the New York Public Library there is only one way to estimate how many people have come to the library during a given time. This is by a count of the books which readers have taken out. To see if readers had filled out questionnaires in the same proportion as they had withdrawn books, the number of questionnaires from all branches sampled in January, 1936, and the circulation figure for the same month were correlated. The resultant figure of  $+0.76$  (a perfect correlation is  $1.00$ ) is high enough to assure us that we have reached a representative number of the total number of people who came to the different branches.

A further objection was offered by branch librarians themselves, who felt that in many cases students had been overcanvassed to the point of producing distortion. As a check on this objection, comparable studies which the Graduate Library School had made in other communities were consulted. In South Chicago, where paid investigators canvassed from house to house, 49.1 per cent of all people using the public library were found to be students; in St. Louis, where the same method was used, 50 per cent of the library patrons were drawn from student ranks. In New York the proportion of students in the whole library population was 38.2 per cent. Thus, in the New York study, there was a smaller representation of students than in the general community-wide canvasses made in other cities. The average for the three studies is 45 per cent student patronage.

Furthermore, comparisons between the surveys of 1934 and 1936 indicate that the method has important elements of reliability. The proportion of men to women readers in the various age brackets, the proportionate representation of easily identified groups such as students or housewives, and the proportionate number of people reporting grade school, high school, or college education, remains amazingly and reassuringly constant. How constant, is revealed in a comparison of the proportions of male patronage recorded in three samples made over a period of four years: in the 1932 study of Seward Park and Woodstock branches<sup>5</sup> men constituted 57.4 per cent of the registration, 55.8 per cent of the circulation; in the 1934 study of 12 branch libraries 55.8 per cent of the patrons interviewed were men; and in the 1936 study of 46 branch libraries this

<sup>5</sup> See Douglas Waples, "Community Studies in Reading. I. Reading in the Lower East Side," *Library Quarterly*, III (1933), 1-20.

proportion was 55.1 per cent. Such facts as these lead us to the belief that, within the well-known limits of this kind of study, our results have more than a fortuitous verity.

Another objection that one meets in studies confined to a particular institution is that the findings are endemic and have little real meaning when applied elsewhere. This is probably more acutely felt about New York than about any other American city, some people going so far as to insist that New York is typical of neither America nor Europe but is a corner of earth complete and strange within itself. One might dwell at length on the fallacies inherent in this notion, or on the healthy and stubborn provincialisms which are reciprocated between natives of the city and the rest of the country, or on the widespread attitude in library circles that the New York Public Library, because certain features of its organization fail to follow the orthodox pattern, cannot be considered typical of the majority of metropolitan library systems. But underlying all such attitudes and argument is the fact that basic human similarities exist whenever people, libraries, and books are brought into concert, no matter if it be in Cairo, Egypt, or in Cairo, Illinois.

As a final observation, it is recognized that many librarians feel that in classifying people in groups, we lose sight of the individual—that when a group is described as made up of housewives, unskilled laborers, or clerks and stenographers, the very inclusiveness of the description tends to rob it of meaning.

It is in connection with this point that an understanding of the ultimate aim of studies such as this is essential. In essence, if we are to arrive at an understanding of the millions of people who never enter the doors of a public li-

brary, it is vital that we know more about those who do; and it is necessary, when considering hundreds of thousands of library patrons, all different and all alike, that we think of them for a moment in broad, defining terms; that we forget the vagaries of individual personality and view patrons as larger groups of individuals having certain common denominators, such as sex and age, education and occupation.

Even though the concept of the group mind may be hard for some to swallow, the concept of group personality is used constantly and daily by almost everyone. There are innumerable social compulsions, some large, some small indeed, which force a group consciousness or personality on people who do the same job, read the same newspapers, have similar educational and economic experiences, hold like fears, hopes, and prejudices, and swear to the same symbols.

And it is only human nature, whether it be in running a grocery store, teaching a class of pupils, selling bonds, or conducting a library, to remember most vividly those individuals whose peculiarities set them apart, who are in varying degrees atypical of the group to which they belong. A librarian suggests and issues a thousand books during the course of a week, and, when the run of the mine is forgotten, his clearest remembrances are of the grimy laborer searching for Remy de Gourmont; of the little girl who wanted "a sad book, please"; of the busy executive who stopped to discuss the proletarian novel; or of the few boorish or stupid persons who caused unpleasantness. The colorless average usually serve as a backdrop for the projection of the more colorful, more easily remembered extremes.

Our task, therefore, in a study of this nature, is to search

out the *average library patron*. For, obviously, clearly defined norms are basic to any philosophy of direct action. As one of the characters says in Claire Spencer's *Gallows' Orchard*: "When one sees people in a mass one is inclined to philosophize about life, but when one sees one man at a time and considers one man at a time, one grows confused and enchanted, and even the simplest seems very strange and complicated, and one gets lost in what seems like a labyrinth of contradictory emotions."<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Reprinted by courtesy of Random House, Inc., New York.



## CHAPTER II

### WHO COMES TO THE PUBLIC LIBRARY

#### ORGANIZATION OF THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

**R**ISKING the repetition of common knowledge, this chapter begins with a brief résumé of the organization of public libraries in New York City and a description of the metropolitan areas which they serve. Unlike other American cities, New York has not one unified library system, but three. The borough of Queens and the borough of Brooklyn each have highly developed systems which, owing to a chain of historical accidents, are self-contained and complete. The New York Public Library, on the other hand, has for its service area the boroughs of Manhattan, the Bronx, and Richmond. The sole administrative connection between these three library systems, other than voluntary co-operation, is a common dependence on municipal funds.

The New York Public Library further deviates from the usual pattern of library organization. Separated into two well-defined departments, it is a dual institution devoted to a mutual purpose—the general social usage of books. Moreover, the Circulation Department is lacking in one feature characteristic of almost all city library systems, namely, a large central reservoir of circulating books which readers may use directly. As a result, although the branch located in the central building circulates more books than any other, its circulation is significantly less in proportion

to total branch circulation than is the case in Cleveland, Los Angeles, or Boston. This fact presumably has an influence on the character of branch reading.

The Reference Department, maintained by private funds, stems from the Astor Library, founded in 1849 by bequest of John Jacob Astor, who died the previous year; the Lenox Library, founded by James Lenox ten years before his death in 1880; and the Tilden Trust, formed in 1887, a year following the death of Samuel J. Tilden, former governor of New York State. These bequests were consolidated in 1895 in the name of the New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations. These original endowments together with subsequent augmentations amounted in 1936 to over \$47,000,000 and have given the city one of the finest reference collections in the world. Such studies as Waples and Lasswell's *National Libraries and Foreign Scholarship* have shown certain areas of its collection to be unsurpassed from the standpoint of international scholarship.

Although privately endowed, the Reference Department is public in every meaning of the word. Through its doors come scholars, laymen, booklovers, and rubbernecks not only from the surrounding region but from every state in the Union and from abroad. In 1936, for example, a total of 3,619,988 persons were registered as visitors to the building (a daily average of 9,918), and 4,282,656 books were consulted in the various reading rooms. No books are circulated for use outside of the department.

The second division of the library—the Circulation Department—is maintained almost entirely from public funds. The same director has ultimate control over both departments. The administrative offices, a circulating library, and the Extension Division of the Circulation De-

partment are housed in the main building of the Reference Department. Forty-six branch libraries and eleven sub-branches are scattered throughout the three boroughs.

The history of the development of the Circulation Department is a complicated record of haphazard and casual growth beginning with the organization of the Harlem Library in 1825 and culminating in the consolidation, in 1901, of the eleven branches of the New York Free Circulating Library with the New York Public Library. In the same year Andrew Carnegie's princely gift of \$5,200,000 for the construction and equipment of additional branches established the future of the department. This act of consolidation, together with Carnegie's philanthropy, produced what was, until the phenomenal shift of confiscated books to post-revolutionary Leningrad, the most extensive library system the world has ever seen.

Although the majority of its patrons are residents of the three boroughs constituting the service area, numbers of people working in downtown New York but residing in other sections of the commuting area hold cards in the Circulation Department. There is no adequate check of their number, and for present purposes the three boroughs which support the library are considered to be the unique area of service.

Within this triborough confine live more than three and a quarter million potential library patrons, a little less than half of the city's entire population. The difficult problem of serving a clientele as numerous as the population of Minnesota or of Lithuania, and racially as heterogeneous as Western Europe itself, is further complicated by topographical considerations.

The service area of the library encompasses some 124 square miles. Richmond, commonly known as Staten Is-

land, is the largest of the three boroughs and also the most sparsely populated. Although an old community, still bearing traces of the Dutch occupation, it has been hampered in its growth by the lack of rapid transportation to the heart of the city. Despite the fact that ferries and bridges are the only means of communication, Richmond's population increased by a third between 1920 and 1930. In contrast to the other two boroughs, Richmond has few mass housing units. Over half of its residents are homeowners.

Manhattan, the smallest in size, is the most thickly peopled although it is constantly losing residents to other areas, with consequent social and political reverberations. Second only to Brooklyn in population, it is the office and business center of Greater New York. Its daytime population, far in excess of its actual inhabitants, is swollen by half a million commuters and transients who clog the shopping and financial districts.

Change is inherent in the soil of the island. One librarian, within her professional life, has witnessed the transition of her neighborhood from Jewish to Russian, from Russian to Spanish, and is now faced with the necessity of readjusting her library to serve a community which has lately changed from West Indian to American Negro. Each shift of ethnic groupings has meant reorganization of the book collection to meet the needs of incoming residents and the addition of assistants versed in the language, literature, and psychology peculiar to the new clientele.

Second largest in area and third most densely populated of all New York's boroughs is the Bronx, which enjoys a steady if not spectacular growth. Its heaviest concentration of population lies across the Harlem River, which separates it from Manhattan. Three-fourths of the Bronx's

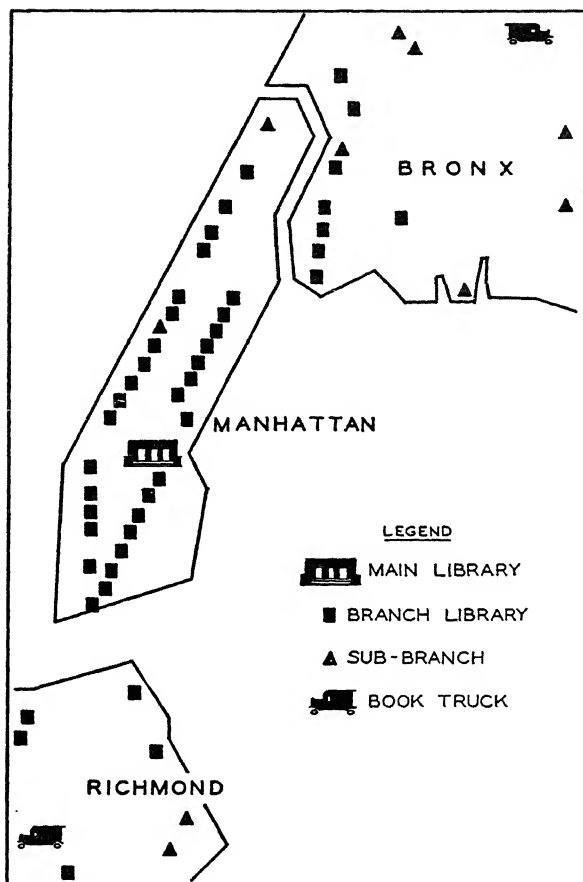


FIG. 1.—Stations of service of the New York Public Library\*

\* Adapted by permission from *Your Public Library*, II, No. 2 (September, 1937), a leaflet issued by the New York Public Library Staff Association.

inhabitants live in apartment houses. Here, too, population changes have affected the nature of local libraries. The Woodstock branch, for instance, has seen its neighborhood change from a German-American to a middle-class, rather intellectual Jewish community. Within the past seven or eight years, infiltrations of Negroes, Greeks, Spaniards, and Irish have reduced the Jewish population by 30 per cent, and the librarian reports indications that her work will eventually be entirely with Negro patrons.

In Figure 1 the distribution of branches and subbranches is shown. The book truck, indicated in the upper corner, serves that section of the Bronx which lies north of the Fordham branch. Lack of funds has prevented the library from extending complete permanent service to residents of this area. Recently, a new book truck has replaced the old one used to carry books to inhabitants of outlying sections of Richmond.

#### THE LIBRARY IN THE COMMUNITY

Realities of finance, equipment, and human nature, both lay and institutional, hinder the library from entering this scene as a truly democratic force—democratic in the sense of total community participation. Running atilt the odds of reality, librarians generally are content to serve that portion of the population which is, in the hackneyed phrase of the profession, “library conscious.”

How well the New York Public Library has been able to stimulate and meet this library consciousness on its own ground is indicated by Figure 2, showing the total number of persons who, over an eleven-year period, registered themselves as new borrowers. The graphic line begins with 1925 and ascends to its peak in 1931, in which year 214,526 persons took out new cards. Thus, in the peak year, 6 per

cent of the population of the three boroughs made application for new cards in some branch of the library. The gradual decline of the heavy line to the plateau of 1934 and 1935 is attributable in part to the murderous reduction of the city's appropriation for new books, periodicals, and binding, slashed from \$271,909 in 1932 to \$61,357 in 1933. It is a matter for marvel that such drastic municipal re-

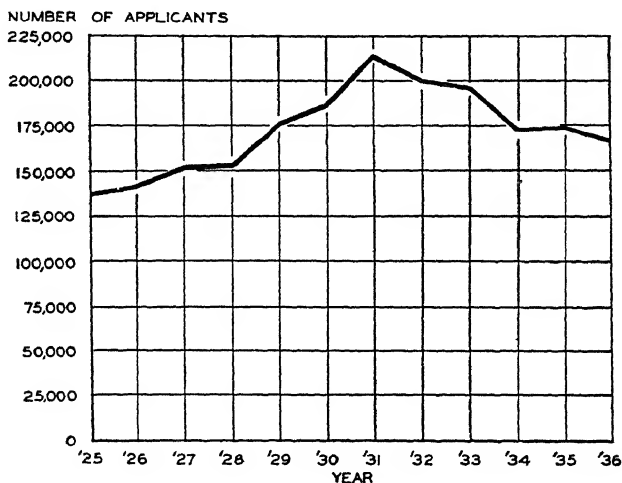


FIG. 2.—Applications for new cards, 1925-36

trenchments were not more seriously disruptive of established library service during the course of the late depression in the larger cities of the country.

Analyses of census material for New York are plentiful and do not need summarizing here.<sup>1</sup> However, there are inherent in any population two factors which should be

<sup>1</sup> The most useful of these are Walter Laidlaw's *Population of the City of New York, 1890-1930* (New York: Cities Census Committee, Inc., and Columbia University Press, 1932); and *New York City Market Analysis*, compiled and copyrighted, 1932, by the *New York Herald Tribune*, the *News*, *New York's Picture Newspaper*, and the *New York Times*.

considered from the point of view of the public library and its role in the community. One is the number of illiterates, which automatically eliminates a large potential of patronage. The other is the strength and character of the local student population, which vitally influence the type of service offered to the community as a whole.

In 1930 the illiteracy rate for persons ten years old and over averaged 4.2 per cent for the three boroughs, a decrease of 1.1 per cent since the preceding census. In Manhattan, where the rate was highest, 11.9 per cent of the foreign-born whites were reported illiterate; in the Bronx, 8.5 per cent; and in Richmond, 9.9 per cent. The average for foreign-born whites in the entire area was 10.1 per cent. Negro illiteracy stood at less than 2 per cent. One-tenth of the foreign-born whites, in a city where there are many such, is perforce beyond the dominion of the library.

In the same year, three-quarters of a million students between the ages of seventeen and twenty were enrolled in public schools in the three boroughs. This represents an increase of 15 per cent over the 1920 figure. In addition to this growing number hundreds of thousands of persons were enrolled in private schools, in colleges and universities, were attending night classes and vocational schools, or taking adult education courses and correspondence work. These people represent an army of a million or more obliged to turn to public book resources by the general inadequacy of academic libraries and cajoled by special inducements held out by both school and library. These facts alone, when extended, are explanatory of the nationwide preoccupation with readers below the age of thirty.

Circulation work with children, adolescents, and students is a vital and indispensable part of the library's scheme of things. However, it might be well to pause and



consider the ultimate effects of this educational philosophy in terms of the community-wide penetration of the library.

Controversy over the question whether libraries are justified in overemphasizing their services to the younger reader, or whether such overemphasis constitutes, in the final analysis, a disservice to the adult population, is not the object of this discussion. The object is to seek a clarification of the true situation so that both points of view may meet in parity and realism.

Is the library a public institution which is, consciously or unconsciously, selective in its character? Ought library service to be extended to the whole population? To answer such questions we must first know how representative library patrons are of the community at large. And to do this statistics are our only recourse.

Since the age range of the three boroughs is the one measurement common to the census data and the data gathered in the survey, Figure 3, which combines the two, is used as a graphic illustration.

In a startling manner there is revealed the disproportionate use made of the branch libraries by readers below the age of thirty. In the Reference Department, where intolerable overcrowding resulted in the exclusion of students from general use of the department in 1931, the presence of readers of all ages is much more consistent with their normal range in the population.

However, the important thing to ponder, if a static picture can be made dynamic, is that the use of the popular library declines distressingly after patrons reach the age of thirty, and that nowhere above that age does the library clientele conform to the population outside its walls. The patrons of the Reference Department, on the other hand, do not fall below the normal age level until the age of fifty

is reached, and from then on the fall is slight and progressive.

Nor is this situation peculiar to New York. Comparing the library population with the general population in South Chicago, Mr. Ellsworth<sup>2</sup> found that the ratio for

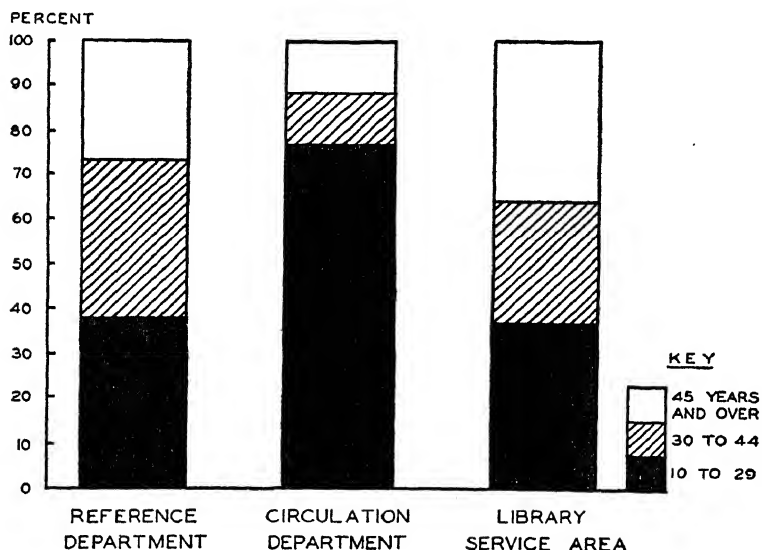


FIG. 3.—Age of population of service area contrasted with age of patrons of Circulation and Reference Departments.

people between ten and twenty years of age was 2:1; for persons between thirty and forty-five it was reversed. In certain sections of St. Louis the ratio for people between ten and twenty was over 3:1. For people above that age the ratio was the same as that of South Chicago. In New York the ratios are substantially the same as for St. Louis.

<sup>2</sup> R. E. Ellsworth, "The Distribution of Books and Magazines in Selected Communities" (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Graduate Library School, University of Chicago, 1937).

This condition is a logical, natural outgrowth of the reciprocal relationship which the public library and the public school have fostered. Whether the library can maintain a supplementary relationship indefinitely is open to some doubt. Many social trends seem to point to the wisdom of the library becoming more and more complementary to the work of the school. Certainly, with the current professional absorption in adult education, with the effects of governmentally inspired agencies for the training of adults, with the gradual strengthening and growth of school libraries under more rigidly conceived and enforced standards of accreditation, and with the prediction of a static population by 1960, librarians will be called upon for ways and means of closing the gap between the age level of their patrons and the age level of the total population.

#### CHARACTERISTICS OF LIBRARY PATRONS

Branch libraries in New York differ widely in the average ages of their respective clienteles. This is dependent on the character of the neighborhood—its proximity to schools, the kinds of dwellings it contains, the presence of certain racial groups, the sort of books made available, and other factors.

Among the divisions of the Reference Department, Music and Art attract the youngest patrons, Patents and Science the oldest, while the Main Reading Room and the Jewish Division are more consistent in their appeal to readers of every age.

In some lay quarters one occasionally encounters the stereotype to the effect that public libraries are primarily the refuge of idle women. That this is distinctly untrue is emphasized by both the preliminary survey of 1934 and the survey of 1936.

In 1934 a sampling of twelve branch libraries showed 56 per cent of the readers to be male. The more comprehensive survey of 1936, embracing forty-six branches, resulted in a deviation from the original figure of less than 1 per cent. While we have no comparable long-time statistics on comparative withdrawals, it is apparent that in the New York system men constitute somewhere between 55 and 56 per cent of the people found in the branch libraries. Variations occur, of course, among the smaller branches, one of which reported a female patronage as high as 70 per cent. There seems to be a slight tendency for middle-aged women to come to the library more often than do men of a corresponding age.

The Reference Department is overwhelmingly the territory of the masculine reader. In both years the proportion of male use was found to be between 82 and 84 per cent.<sup>3</sup> The constancy of these figures when the experiment was repeated has been cited as evidence of the validity of the approach. It is interesting to note that in the Reference Department women make the heaviest use of those divisions dealing with aesthetics—Music and Art in particular—while they account for less than 7 per cent of the readers in the Science and Technology Division and in the Chemistry and Patents Rooms.

The subtler and more complex nature of the uses to which a reference collection is put are reflected in the educational experience of the patrons of the Reference Department. Here 73 per cent of the readers have had college training, whereas only 46 per cent of the branch

<sup>3</sup> In the summer of 1926 a rather casual survey in the central building showed an average attendance of 83 per cent of men and 17 per cent of women in the Main Reading Room, with a masculine top of 93 per cent in the Newspaper Division, and a low of 52 per cent in Genealogy (H. M. Lydenberg, "Do Men Read?" *Bulletin of the New York Public Library*, XXX [1926], 565-67).

patrons, including students, are possessed of a college background. In both departments between 4 and 5 per cent of the readers have completed grade school only. In the branches half of the readers are either high school students or high school graduates, and three-fourths of these are under thirty. Because there are and have been more men in college than women, college-trained men using branch libraries outnumber college-trained women by 10 per cent.

In the Reference Department, the Chemistry and Patents Rooms and the Jewish Division attract the highest proportion of college-trained readers.

When we remember that probably no more than 10 per cent of the American people over twenty-one years of age are graduates of high schools,<sup>4</sup> the public's response to libraries seems very uneven, but, at the same time, the part which the library can and will play in the national education program seems to be one of limitless possibility.

In chapter i the use of occupation as a quick and familiar way of describing an undifferentiated mass of people was mentioned, and also the fact that the number of students using branch libraries in New York was somewhat less than in other cities.

In the Circulation Department 38 per cent of the readers were shown to be students. In Reference, where they are not allowed except under special provision, less than 5 per cent of the readers belong to the student group.

The contrast in occupational groups using the two departments is even more striking in the case of the nonstudents. In Reference the heaviest use is made by profes-

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Office of Education, *Biennial Survey of Education in the United States, 1932-34* ("Bulletin 1935," No. 2; Washington: Government Printing Office, 1937), chap. i.

sional people—59 per cent of all readers falling in this category. In the branches professionals constitute less than 14 per cent of the total. In both departments the clerk and stenographer group has the second strongest representation—15 per cent in Circulation and 9 per cent in Reference.

In 1934-35, over half of the people enrolled in formal adult classes in New York City were studying commercial subjects, and so great was the number that local educators questioned the prudence of mass education for stenography and allied skills. It is only natural that such a group, young and socially mobile, should turn to the library for vocational materials not readily available elsewhere, and that their expressed dissatisfactions should relate, first, to the dearth of materials on shorthand and secretarial work and, second, to the lack of current fiction, of which they are known to be avid readers.

Housewives, a large group in branch work, though not as large as in other localities, are representative of less than 1 per cent of the patrons of the Reference Department. In five divisions, none were found, and in only two—Jewish and Music—did they represent more than 2 per cent of the total readers.

Skilled tradesmen, whose library wants are usually technical, visit the Reference Department more than Circulation. Unskilled laborers, unfortunately a minor group among library patrons in general, visit both departments about equally. At the time of the survey, 6 per cent of the readers in Circulation and half as many in Reference reported themselves to be unemployed.

Among branch patrons the modal group, or the majority, of the students are below the age of twenty; the majority of the housewives are from twenty to forty; the

shopkeepers and salesmen, or business folk, between twenty and twenty-five; the professionals and the clerks and stenographers, from twenty to thirty; the skilled tradesmen, unskilled laborers, and unemployed, from fifteen to twenty-five. Housewives and professionals appear with most consistency in all age levels; the unemployed, whose modal age is from fifteen to twenty, also make up a large proportion of the readers over sixty.

Groups furnishing the greatest number of readers of grade school background are housewives, skilled tradesmen, unskilled laborers, and unemployed. Eighty per cent of the professionals reported college training.

It is noteworthy that the only two occupational groups which are predominantly female, namely, housewives and clerks and stenographers, are also those groups known to account for the heaviest withdrawal of fiction. Dr. Waples, studying the used-up book cards in six branches of the New York Public Library in 1932, found housewives making three-fourths of their selections in the field of fiction. Women clerks and stenographers withdrew 66 per cent fiction. In contrast, 43 per cent of the books withdrawn by professional men were fiction, as were 39 per cent of the books taken out by male shopkeepers and salesmen.

Since New York and all its institutions are generally regarded as slightly foreign to the American scene, it might be well to compare the occupational distribution of branch library patrons with those in other cities. Table 1, based on studies made by the Graduate Library School and the data of the present survey, compares New York with South Chicago and St. Louis.

Student representation has been previously discussed. Housewives, who figure largely in South Chicago and St. Louis, are a relatively minor group in New York. It seems

certain that the more urbanized the community is, the smaller will be the proportion of housewives using the public library. Witness such a suburban community as Hinsdale, Illinois, where Carnovsky found this group to be almost 38 per cent of the total registrants.<sup>5</sup>

TABLE 1  
OCCUPATION OF LIBRARY PATRONS IN THREE CITIES

Occupation	South Chicago	St. Louis	New York	Average
Students.....	49.1	50.0	38.2	45.7
Housewives.....	17.4	18.5	5.7	13.9
Shopkeepers and salesmen....	6.3	3.4	4.2	4.6
Professionals.....	3.4	7.3	13.6	8.1
Clerks and stenographers.....	2.2	8.7	14.7	8.5
Skilled tradesmen.....	3.2	6.6	4.4	4.7
Unskilled laborers.....	12.7	1.6	2.8	5.7
Unknown.....	6.0	4.2	10.4	6.9
Unemployed.....	No data	No data	5.9	.....

The higher proportion of professional people using the New York Public Library reflects the nature of the city. Twice as many are represented here as in St. Louis, four times as many as in the industrial area of South Chicago. Likewise, the proportion of clerks and stenographers in New York as contrasted with the proportion of unskilled laborers in the South Chicago libraries attests the protean nature of librarianship and the need for flexibility in technique as well as catholicity in book selection.

<sup>5</sup> Leon Carnovsky, "Community Studies in Reading. II. Hinsdale, a Suburb of Chicago," *Library Quarterly*, V (1935), 1-30.



## CHAPTER III

### INSIDE THE PUBLIC LIBRARY

IT IS commonplace to speak of the public library as satisfying three social necessities—the need for information, the need for inspiration, and the need for recreation. To these a fourth should be added, namely, the need for education, to distinguish from the directional and informational activities those needs which in the library's unorthodox but no less genuine pedagogy are essentially educational in nature.

This does not mean to imply that inspirational and recreational books supplied to the public are a whit less important than the more serious literature, or that any book, or the reading of any book, however trivial, can be neatly categorized as to its content, purpose, or effect. Indeed, one can visualize situations in which the reading of Zane Grey or Spengler might be educational and informative and at the same time yield emotions of inspiration and recreation. The pulps undoubtedly represent all four values to thousands of their readers. Reading, in common with all human activity, can be evaluated only in relation to the coactions and time which give it birth.

But the fact remains that so long as the library holds in trusteeship the tools of education, so long as it continues to teach, wittingly or no, through the informal means at its disposal, it is fundamentally and finally an educational institution. And as such it owes an obligation to itself and to society to clarify its position and to state more concretely its methods and province.

This, of course, is easy to say and hard to do; certainly this study is assuming no more of the task than a few wide generalizations of evidence. It does assume, however, that if we are able to discover some of the purposes for which the library is most used by its readers, a broad and exploratory indication of the main functions of the public library will result. Motivations behind readers' selections

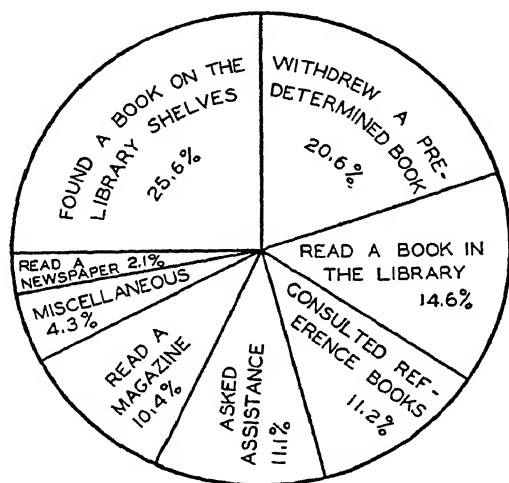


FIG. 4.—Distribution of activities of all patrons visiting the Circulation Department.

of material are interesting to all concerned with popular education through the media of books and libraries. Likewise, administrators and librarians responsible for policies and provisions of floor service, reading-room facilities, and reference service, may find value in an inventory of library use from the readers' point of view.

Figure 4 shows how readers in the branches of the Circulation Department distribute their library use among a variety of activities possible in any library.

As is seen, the major activity has to do with the reader's method of selecting books. This has been refined to show whether he selected books at random from the shelves after he arrived or whether he withdrew books which he had in mind before coming to the library.

After the first two major activities the third most frequently reported is the reading of books within the building; the fourth, the consultation of reference materials; fifth, the asking of assistance from a staff member; and sixth, the reading of magazines in the library.

These six activities, then, are the major uses to which the library is put by its readers. The relatively minor activities reported are the reading of newspapers and certain miscellaneous activities such as paying fines, reserving books, etc.

The diagram represents the total public response to certain features of the library service. However, since one reader might engage in one or in all of the possible activities, it does not show, for instance, how many readers consulted reference books during the survey week, but rather how the consultation of reference books ranks as an activity in relation to the others.

For practical purposes it is more important that we know what proportion of a typical clientele uses the circulation features of the library, or the reference facilities, or makes verbal demands upon the staff. Table 2 gives both the number of people engaging in each activity and the per cent they represent of all the readers sampled.

It is significant that over 55 per cent of all readers come to the library to "get something to read," with no specific title in mind, and make their selections from books found on the shelves. Hundreds of testimonials were received showing that for an overwhelming number of people this is

the paramount conception of a public library—a place not unlike a self-service grocery, where one can wander freely from shelf to shelf, examining, rejecting, and selecting as fancy dictates.

Such readers are vocal in their demands for more and better visual guides to exploration—floor plans placed at points of vantage, shelves labeled clearly and simply, publishers' blurbs pasted inside books, etc. In short as a den-

TABLE 2  
NUMBER AND PER CENT OF READERS ENGAGING IN  
VARIOUS LIBRARY ACTIVITIES

Activity	Number of Readers Reporting	Per Cent of All Readers
1. Withdrawal of books:		
Found a book at random on the shelf	9,168	55.4
Withdrew a predetermined book . . .	7,372	44.6
2. Consultation of reference books . . . . .	4,048	24.5
3. Requests for assistance . . . . .	4,022	24.3
4. Reading in the library:		
Read a book . . . . .	5,285	31.9
Read a magazine . . . . .	3,777	22.8
Read a newspaper . . . . .	768	4.6
5. Miscellaneous (reserved a book, paid a fine, etc.) . . . . .	1,563	9.4

tist, a patron of a neighborhood branch, remarked, "What we want is a public library comparable to the better rental libraries, where things are laid out in a pattern which can be followed by anyone."

In contrast to this method is the withdrawal of specific, predetermined books for which the reader has made a special trip to the library. This is the method of 45 per cent of the readers. As a point of departure for estimating the influence of such outside factors as moving pictures,

the radio, the school, and adult education programs, as they are operative in stimulating and influencing library use, librarians might well evaluate the random use as against the determined. One sort is not necessarily any more important than the other, but outside influences would be more likely to appear among groups whose use is direct and purposeful.

A fourth of all the thousands using the branches during eight days consulted reference books. That another fourth asked for and received personal assistance while in the building is indicative of the amount of personal contact possible in even the largest and most harried library systems.

There is considerable divergence between the library habits of men and women, just as there is considerable divergence in reading habits between the sexes. Men make a greater use of books, magazines, and newspapers within the library building than do women. They also tend to make a heavier use of the reference facilities and, on the whole, they require less aid from members of the staff.

Since women are known to withdraw two-thirds of the fiction books circulated, it is not surprising to find them reporting a heavier use of the general circulation features of the library. In 1932, when fiction accounted for 37.4 per cent of all books circulated by the Circulation Department, Dr. Waples' study of used-up book cards<sup>1</sup> showed that the average male borrower in the branches was withdrawing more nonfiction than fiction. The average woman borrower was withdrawing nearly two books of fiction for every one of nonfiction. For such a group as housewives, this ratio was 3:1. Women are therefore responsible for

<sup>1</sup> Material cited here taken from an unpublished MS in the Graduate Library School, part of which was published as "Community Studies in Reading. I. Reading in the Lower East Side," *Library Quarterly*, III (1933), 1-20.

more books out in circulation, even though men patronize the libraries in larger numbers.

How many women withdraw books for their husbands is not known, although the practice is common, as typified by the importer who wrote the library to explain that "this [questionnaire] was filled in by my wife because she gets my books and makes reservations and consults indexes and so forth. I ask for a certain book and she goes first to this branch and then to 42nd Street library."

Reference books are consulted primarily by the people of school age. Books and magazines are read most by the groups between fifteen and thirty. People above the age of forty-five rely more on the open shelves to direct their reading than do others. Those under forty-five seem to have in mind the books they expect to take out when they come to the library, provided, of course, there are enough copies to go around.

Whereas newspaper reading is the least important activity for people under thirty, for the male patrons above that age it is probably the most frequently reported activity. The relatively well-habituated student group requires less assistance from the staff than do others less self-reliant in the presence of books. It is a thousand pities that the libraries must lose so many of these with the termination of the school period.

The figures make it plain that activities in the library range from simple to complex in accordance with the amount of schooling which people have had. At the grammar school level of training the activity engaged in by the most people is the reading of the newspaper, an activity which can mean much or nothing. At the high school level magazine reading—a comparatively more sophisticated procedure in view of the high standard of library periodi-

cals—is the most characteristic activity. At the college level the characterizing activity relates to the reservation of books, which is suggestive of the more complicated book needs of the better-trained reader.

Similarly, the activity ranking second in importance to each educational group is revealing. For grammar school people it consists in asking assistance from a member of the staff; for high school people, selecting a book from the shelves at random; for college people, consulting reference books. Perhaps no other illustration could better show the diversity of the meaning of the library to different kinds of folk.

As for the occupational groups, professionals, clerks and stenographers, and students, in the order named, have most firmly in mind what sort of book they want before they come to the library. It is significant that, scholastically, they are also among the best-trained people in the community. Housewives rank first in the matter of selecting books via the inspection method, a fact that dovetails with their predilection for fiction. Clerks and stenographers, a group containing many women, are most nearly divided between the random and the predetermined methods of selecting books. The less-educated groups, such as the skilled tradesmen, unskilled laborers, and the unemployed, are inclined to come to the library with no especial book in mind and rest their faith on the open shelves.

The reference facilities are used heavily by students, in some branches almost exclusively. Proportionately, college students engage in more reference work than do high school students, a fact which, statistically correct, is hardly news. Professionals and business people make the next heaviest use, and, surprisingly, the unemployed are well represented in this activity.

Housewives use reference facilities less than any other group and ask for the most direct assistance. It seems safe to assume that their questions relate mainly to information concerning directions and recommendations for personal reading. Unskilled laborers, perhaps because of unfamiliarity with library procedures, and professionals, perhaps because they visit the library so seldom, require substantially the same amount of oral aid from the staff.

Professionals, students, and clerks and stenographers, account for the most reservations made on books. Unskilled laborers and skilled tradesmen make less use of this service than do others.

The heavy reading of the newspapers is clearly confined to three groups—the unemployed, the unskilled laborers, and the skilled tradesmen. Students consistently evince little inclination to read the newspaper in the library. Magazine reading is done most by the unemployed and the skilled tradesmen, although here students of high school age figure largely. The three previously mentioned groups also read books inside the building more than do others.

It is evident that the use of the reading room features of the public library follows a distinct pattern. The newspapers, magazines, and, to a lesser extent, books, are read most by the unemployed, the skilled tradesmen, and the unskilled laborers. Students read heavily in magazines; and the newspapers, in frequent instances, appear to be virtually monopolized by the unemployed readers.

#### CAUSES OF SATISFACTORY LIBRARY EXPERIENCE

Since the behavior of readers was used to describe the chief functions of a public library, it is proper to ask how satisfied these people are with the service offered them, and



what elements in it contribute most to their unsatisfactory library experiences?

Normally there are but two ways open to the librarian who would measure the degree of satisfaction his library is giving. One is through a study of circulation records, and the other is through the direct testimony of individuals with whom he comes in contact or with whom members of his staff come in contact. Thus, the satisfaction of readers is measured in terms of gross turnover of books—often an unreliable index of the real worth of a library—or in terms of individual complaint or praise.

As a possible means of straddling both to the advantage of each, all readers visiting branches of the Circulation Department were asked three questions: Did you find what you wanted? Did you find part of what you wanted? Did you fail to find what you were looking for?

In response, a little over half of the more than sixteen thousand readers replied that they had found what they wanted; over a third had partially fulfilled their needs; and about 14 per cent reported flat failure. In view of inadequate appropriations, worn and depleted book collections, overworked and underpaid staff members, and outmoded equipment, it is a notable achievement to satisfy half of the readers and to give partially satisfactory service to another third. But as the ideal must always remain at 100 per cent, we need to know more about those people who are best satisfied with the present limited service and those who are most critical of it.

We can begin by stating that women receive more satisfaction from the library than do men. The explanation is not hard to find. Men generally make more complex demands on the library; their use of the reference facilities is

greater; and they come to the library more often with a definite book in mind, many times to find that it is out or not owned. Women, on the other hand, are greater consumers of fiction, which, as a literary genre, constitutes a disproportionate amount of the collections of most libraries.

The older the reader, the easier it is for the library to satisfy his wants. Readers above the age of forty-five find what they want more frequently than others. Readers under thirty evince the most dissatisfaction, and the middle group from thirty to forty-five represent the average. These figures, obviously, reflect the relative variety and subtlety of library use at different age grades. Readers of school age whose library use is inhibited only by the comparative breadth of curriculums, make more complex demands on the service, while older people, whose reading habits seem to crystallize around definable norms, make demands of a simpler nature.

In respect to educational status satisfaction in the use of the library is inversely proportional to the amount of training readers have had. People of least education are more likely to find satisfaction in the service, within the scope of their library demands, than are people enjoying maximum educational advantages. The degree of satisfaction reported follows closely the levels of education, beginning with grammar school and running to college. However, there is one point worthy of note. The best-trained group, though reporting least satisfactory use, is better able to find substitutes for the materials sought. Of all readers who reported partial satisfaction college-trained people ranked first, high-school-trained people ranked second, and grammar-school-trained people, last. This is to be expected, since the wider the horizon of

tastes, interests, and facility in the application of literature, the better able one is to use a variety of books for personal benefit.

This observation holds especially true with respect to the degree of satisfaction reported by occupational groups. Those signifying the highest degree of satisfaction are, in order, skilled tradesmen, unskilled laborers, and housewives—all of whom use the library for rather uniform purposes. On the other hand, the groups which we are accustomed to regard as being higher in the social, economic, and academic scale—professionals, students, and business folk—while reporting the least degree of direct satisfaction, reported the greatest amount of partial satisfaction in using the library.

These same groups, however, are also representative of those reporting the most failure in finding what they wanted. Business people, students, the unemployed, and professionals, in order named, reported least satisfaction with the service.

The behavior of the unemployed is curious as well as interesting, for, despite the fact that as a group they are the most frequent and regular visitors to the library, they report the least satisfactory use of it. This might be explained in part by the psychology of unemployment and by the disposition of these readers to use the building as a localization of their enforced leisure, regardless of their natural inclinations toward books and libraries. Another, and more popular explanation, would be that the unemployed are turning to the library for specialized vocational aid.

Clerks and stenographers seem to represent the average with respect to the amount of satisfaction and dissatisfaction obtained from using the library.

Naturally there are some activities within the library which are more likely to lead to a satisfactory use of it than are others. The foremost and most predictable of these is the reading of the newspaper. In the light of previous findings it is interesting to know that the withdrawal of predetermined books is much more likely to result in satisfactory library use than is the random selection of titles from the shelf. As an activity promoting satisfaction the former method ranks second, and the latter, seventh.

Receiving help from staff members, and using the reference facilities are activities directly correlated with satisfactory use.

Reserving predetermined books currently out in circulation is the major activity of readers who reported dissatisfaction, and the need is clear for more adequate book appropriations. The disposition of readers to substitute the reading of magazines, books, and newspapers, and the random selection of books from the shelf for desired materials which they failed to obtain is demonstrated when these activities are correlated with the amount of partial and unsatisfactory library experience reported by patrons. As has been pointed out, the direct assistance given by the staff, the consultation of reference materials, and the withdrawal of predetermined books are activities which lead to the maximum amount of satisfactory library use.

In summary, it can be said that the amount of satisfaction a clientele derives from library activities is proportional to the simplicity or complexity of those activities. Simple demands made on the library meet with a high degree of satisfaction. Complex demands meet with a corresponding degree of frustration. Whether the reader's demands

are simple or complex depends almost entirely on his sex, age, educational achievements, and occupation.

Although sex and age determine the amount of satisfactory library use to a certain extent, educational and occupational status are more important determinants. Older, less educated people, engaged in work of a more manual type, are the best-satisfied customers the library possesses. Older people of more education and a higher socioeconomic status are less likely to find the service so satisfactory; and younger people, particularly students and those engaged in business and the professions, find the least degree of satisfaction. The unemployed readers behave in a manner suggestive of psychological considerations which set them somewhat apart.

#### CAUSES OF UNSATISFACTORY LIBRARY EXPERIENCE

Angels, we are told, find it possible to rejoice more over the one repentant sinner than over the ninety and nine already saved. Librarians, while scarcely angels, are human enough to feel a more lively concern for the one reader who fails in his search for books than in the score who leave the building with the volume of their choice and need.

In the eight days of the survey, over 30 per cent of the readers in the branch libraries received only part of the help they expected, and 14 per cent found nothing that was suitable. These failures and near failures are challenges. We need to know more about them and the problems they represent.

When all the thousands of recorded complaints are lumped together, regardless of the number of individuals making them, 39 per cent are seen to refer to the fact that the books which these people wanted were out in circula-

tion. Almost 30 per cent more relate to the library's failure to own a particular title, and an additional 19 per cent refer to the fact that books found and examined proved to be unsatisfactory for the reader's use.

Thus, over 85 per cent of the total complaints have to do with deficiencies in the book stock. Insufficient duplication, nonownership of desired books, and inadequacies in the present collection constitute the major dissatisfactions with the library expressed by the public. Beside these three, other complaints fade into insignificance.

Although the condition is almost entirely the result of shortsighted reductions in the municipal appropriation—all the more cruel for coming at a time when agencies such as the library are most sensitive to their social mission—there are other factors involved. Money and more money may resolve the larger problems, but it does not offer a panacea unless one is willing to take the lyric position that present practices of librarianship are infallible. Book selection, based on the proved needs and capacities of the entire public; the creation of a general awareness of what a library is, what it does, and how it should be used; the elimination of all but the most indispensable mechanisms to bring people and print into contact; and related problems are in the province of the librarian and are only indirectly affected by the amount of money which the city sees fit to allot.

Complaints not referable to the book collection represent 14 per cent of all those received. The fact that the newspaper which readers wanted was being "hogged" by others accounts for 6 per cent of the complaints, and the library's failure to stock certain magazines accounts for another 4 per cent. Inability to obtain magazines either in use in the library or out in circulation and the failure of

desk attendants to answer satisfactorily the questions posed them make up the remaining per cent of complaints.

As was pointed out, the foregoing is a broad picture of the total dissatisfactions registered by all of the borrowers and is presented to show how one sort of complaint ranks in relation to another sort. Frequently the same person registered two or more complaints, and in order to see,

TABLE 3  
NUMBER AND PER CENT OF PATRONS REGISTERING COMPLAINTS

Complaint	Number of Readers Reporting Complaints	Per Cent of Total Readers
1. Deficiencies of purchasing:		
Library does not own desired book..	2,489	15.0
Library does not own desired magazine.....	348	2.1
Library does not own desired newspaper.....	65	0.4
2. Deficiencies of duplication:		
The book was out.....	3,490	21.1
The magazine was out or in use....	211	1.3
The newspaper was in use.....	533	5.9
3. Inadequacy of present book collection	1,714	10.4
4. Failure of assistant to give adequate information.....	108	0.6

for example, how many readers reported the library lacking in the books they wanted, we must turn to Table 3.

On the evidence of the figures, it is apparent that the books chosen by the library are acceptable to the great body of readers. The first reaction to the 15 per cent who say that the library does not own the books they want is to question the legitimacy of their desires or to explain this group away by assuming that most of them want books too specialized to be found in the average branch.

Let us take a look at the kinds of literature which readers want to see added to the shelves. Discounting the momentary best sellers which were requested over and over, the requests for nonfiction were made up almost entirely of books needed in connection with school work of some kind. The titles most requested were, in order: Meredith, *Hygiene*; Hegner, *College Zoölogy*; Kallet and Schlink, *100,000,000 Guinea Pigs*; Harry Elmer Barnes, *The History of Western Civilization*; the *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*; Hayes, *A Political and Social History of Modern Europe*; Durant, *The Mansions of Philosophy*; Karl Marx, *Das Kapital*; Strachey, *The Coming Struggle for Power*; and C. O. Johnson, *Government in the United States*. Most of these titles, of course, are held by one or more libraries. The requests are from every branch in the system.

In the field of fiction suggestions for inclusion were much more widely given, and nine times out of ten they were requests for more books of a favorite author rather than for a definite title. Here, again, we are excluding the best sellers current at the time of the survey. The most widely requested author was Zane Grey, followed somewhat sheepishly by Sinclair Lewis, Upton Sinclair, P. G. Wodehouse, and Edgar Rice Burroughs. Grouping authors by the frequency with which they were requested, the second group was composed of Jack London, Kathleen Norris, Marcel Proust, Sax Rohmer, Rafael Sabatini, Thorne Smith, and Edgar Wallace. In the third group were R. H. Benson, Pearl Buck, James Oliver Curwood, Jeffery Farnol, Gene Stratton Porter, Mary Roberts Rinehart, Romain Rolland, and S. S. Van Dine. Group 4 contains such writers as G. K. Chesterton, Joseph Conrad, Warwick Deeping, Mazo de la Roche, Ethel M. Dell, John



Dos Passos, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Alexandre Dumas, William Faulkner, James Joyce, Guy de Maupassant, E. Phillips Oppenheim, Vincent Sheean, Hugh Walpole, H. G. Wells, and Thomas Wolfe.

If a twinge of discouragement is felt at the general mediocrity of popular preferences, it is well to remember that the reading of a book of any sort is a comparatively rare phenomenon in this country. Reliable estimates place the number of book-readers as somewhere between a fourth and a third of the population.

It can be inferred that for most people the library's collection of magazines and newspapers is satisfactory since there were few complaints received on this score.

For the greater number of readers deficiencies in the duplication of titles are more serious than failures of selection. Twenty-one per cent of all readers reported that the book they wanted was in circulation, as against 15 per cent who reported that the desired book was not owned by the library. Similarly, about 6 per cent of the readers complained of not being able to get at copies of the newspaper but only 0.4 per cent said that the library failed to own the newspaper of their choice.

About 10 per cent of the readers found the books inadequate. Only 108 of the entire number reported that the floor and desk assistants had failed to answer questions in an acceptable manner. It would be interesting to know whether the queries were answerable, or whether they belonged in that great category of "Please, tell me a book that will make me witty," or "What is the best one-volume compendium of the world's literature, history, and art?"

Since women are the chief consumers of fiction, and since fiction circulates more rapidly than other types of literature, it is only natural that the greatest divergence

between the sexes is occasioned by the high percentage of women reporting that the book they wanted was out. Four per cent more women than men record this complaint. The only other outstanding feminine dissatisfaction is that the newspaper always seems to be in use. One has only to look in any library reading room and observe the number of men leaning ponderously and timelessly over the daily paper to realize how well grounded is this complaint.

Masculine dissatisfactions predominate with regard to the failure of the library to stock certain magazines and newspapers and with regard to the inadequacy of the books owned. Since men use the reference facilities more than women, this probably reflects the inability of smaller branches to extend comprehensive reference service to the patrons. Designated reference centers such as the Bronx Reference Center and the collections at Fordham have undoubtedly done much toward solving this problem in their areas.

Men and women are equal in the per cent of dissatisfaction reported due to the failure of the library to own the book desired, and in the per cent of complaints growing out of the fact that the magazines desired are either out, if they are older issues, or in use, if they are current.

Different ages discover different irritations. The younger readers of school age are most critical of the selection of books. Complaints regarding nonownership of a desired newspaper are made most frequently by readers over thirty and come from two groups, those who want Communist and Socialist organs, and those who want more newspapers printed in foreign languages. Younger people are more prone to find the books inadequate or not owned than are older people. Inadequacy of present books and lack of a wider selection become less important as the age range is

increased, commensurate with the library's ability to meet the demands of the older readers. To all readers under forty-five the inability of staff members to answer questions satisfactorily is a relatively minor complaint, indicating a possible predisposition on the part of older people to ask questions of an involved or obscure nature. This statement excludes the student group from the general run of younger readers because their heavy use of the reference facilities makes inevitable a certain amount of failure for both themselves and the staff.

In the matter of readers' educational background the recorded complaints follow the pattern of activity in the library. The best-trained people complain most because they engage in more complex activities, such as reference work, searching for predetermined books, and needing others which must be reserved. The least-trained group make fewer complaints, and those they make refer to the lack of enough newspapers and magazines in the reading room, and to the fact that when they ask for personal help they do not always get what they expect.

Among the occupational groups the fact that the coveted book had been withdrawn by someone else was reported most by clerks and stenographers and next by students—two groups shown to have well in mind the books they want before they come to the library. Professionals, however, the heaviest withdrawers of predetermined books, report less dissatisfaction on this account. This may be attributable to the slower turnover of the kind of books which they want.

Housewives as a group report the fewest complaints that desired books are out. However, they are next to professionals in proclaiming that the library does not stock the sort of books they want. Literally hundreds of com-

ments can be produced to explain this seeming paradox. The explanation is simple. Housewives, on their own admission, want the latest fiction of the variety obtainable at most rental libraries. The public library fails to satisfy their demands because it cannot carry enough copies of those books which one reader described as "the kind everyone is talking about"—the reading of which, in the most realistic sense, constitutes a minor social triumph.

In the absence of these books, housewives search the shelves looking for something to read and are content when they chance upon an author or a title that they know and enjoy. Out of the survey came abundant evidence to show that this group, in particular, would welcome the installation of a rental collection in the New York Public Library, which would assure their obtaining best sellers and current literature at a more rapid rate than is possible under a reserve system.

For a different reason professionals and students also rank high in complaining that the library fails to stock the books they need. Clerks and stenographers seem most completely to approve of the present collection but register the most complaints concerning lack of duplication.

Shopkeepers and salesmen, professionals, skilled tradesmen, and students find greatest inadequacy in the books provided by the library. This is thoroughly understandable since each of these groups seeks material relating to its specialized field, whether it be business, vocational, or academic.

The unemployed readers and the professionals register the largest number of complaints about the lack of certain newspapers. The explanation for the juxtaposition of the two groups lies in the difference in the type of newspaper desired. Although the majority of the complaints come

from people of grammar school education, enough professionals requested left-wing newspapers, such as the *Daily Worker*, to make them rank high in this respect. Except for this aberration, the dissatisfaction with newspapers follows the established pattern.

Housewives voice most of the female resentment against male appropriation of the newspaper. And the groups responsible for the heaviest newspaper use—unskilled laborers, skilled tradesmen, and the unemployed—are also responsible for the most complaints on the score that someone of their number has beat them to the available copies.

Characteristically, this complaint is of least importance to students. They have been shown to read heavily in the library's magazines, but, proportionately, their dissatisfactions with the current subscriptions are less in number than those of any other group of readers. And their heavy use is reflected in the fact that all other groups outrank them in complaining that they cannot get hold of current copies. The approval of the student group may be partly due to the fact that the "class" magazines carried by most libraries are usually the ones found in school libraries too, and that their use in both places is for the implementing of curricular work.

It is younger readers in business, in the skilled trades, or unemployed who are the most dissatisfied with the current selections and who make the most requests for new titles.

Because thousands of individual magazines were suggested for inclusion in the library, it is impossible to describe them except as types. Those types which were most frequently suggested are: (1) liberal and radical magazines such as *New Masses*, the *Socialist Call*, the *New Republic*, etc., representing almost a fourth of all requests received;

(2) foreign-language magazines, representing 6.4 per cent of all requests; (3) digest magazines, 6.3 per cent of all suggestions; (4) fine-arts magazines, such as *Arts and Decoration*, *Connoisseur*, *Etude*, *Design*, etc., which account for 6 per cent of the requests; (5) sport, outdoor, and hobby magazines, 5.8 of the requests; (6) weekly news magazines—*Time*, *Literary Digest*, *News Week*—accounting for 5 per cent; (7) popular science and popular mechanics magazines, also 5 per cent; and a variety of others distributed

TABLE 4

PER CENT OF EACH OCCUPATIONAL GROUP FAILING  
TO RECEIVE HELP FROM ASSISTANTS

Unemployed.....	4.6
Students.....	3.5
Skilled tradesmen.....	2.7
Unknown.....	2.3
Shopkeepers and salesmen.....	2.2
Clerks and stenographers.....	2.1
Professionals.....	1.5
Unskilled laborers.....	1.4
Housewives.....	1.4

about equally among magazines designated as business, professional, juvenile, fiction, élite, women's and home, health and hygiene, radio, movie, humor, etc.

About four thousand readers, or one-fourth of the total number, asked for some kind of assistance while using the library. Only 108 reported failure to obtain the necessary information. Thus, 3 per cent left the library dissatisfied, a figure which by its smallness does credit to the alertness and ingenuity of the staff. To throw further light on the kinds of people whose questions are not satisfactorily answered, Table 4 is given. For each occupational group the total number of readers who asked for and failed to receive aid from assistants has been computed by per cent.

This represents the degree of dissatisfaction reported by each group.

To demonstrate how and to what degree certain causes of dissatisfaction are connected with certain activities in the library would require a battery of statistical tables. It will be far easier, if the reader will accept sight unseen the validity of the mathematical steps used in arriving at conclusions, to dramatize the statistics in the guise of a composite personality. Although this procedure is vulnerable, the evidence has been so cumulative and interlocking that it is felt to be justified. Perhaps the projection of research against a familiar background needs no justification.

For example, let us consider the group which reads the library's copy of the daily newspapers, and let statistics evoke a mental picture of the composite modal reader in a composite branch library. Already we know quite a bit about him—that he is likely to be middle-aged or older, of minimum education, and to belong to the group of skilled tradesmen or unskilled laborers, or to be unemployed. He comes to the branch library with regularity, visiting it at least once a week, and frequently every day. He usually comes for the express purpose of reading the newspapers and magazines, and, to a lesser extent, books.

Arriving at the library and having read the available papers, he is annoyed that the library does not possess more. His annoyance may be a chronic grudge against the library for not subscribing to a foreign-language paper or a radical sheet in which he is especially interested. With the papers read, he turns to his next favorite activity—reading the magazines—and he makes the discovery that the library does not own a particular magazine which he is

anxious to see, or he may cast a habitually disapproving eye at the magazine shelf, remembering that the library still does not take so-and-so, although he knows there are plenty of people like himself who would like to have it on hand. Recalling a good and unfinished article in the *American Magazine*, he rummages the shelf for it and is disgusted when told that a housewife has withdrawn it that morning, it being an older issue and therefore allowed to circulate. With time to spare and present resources exhausted, he approaches the young lady at the desk, seeking suggestions for some good books. She conducts him to a shelf and leaves him to browse. But the books he picks up seem somehow not just what he wants. They seem inadequate—either too technical, too elementary, too long, too dull, too something. He thinks of a couple of books he wants to read and to find them he is more likely to return again to the obliging young lady than to search for them in the catalog. However, it develops that one of the books is not owned by the library, and the other has been charged out to a typist from the office building across the street.

No doubt anyone but a composite reader would capitulate before this train of frustrations and vow himself into the serenity of complete illiteracy. But, being composite, he does not need to be rational also.

For the sake of elaborating the description, let us draw another fanciful picture of typical behavior, using those readers who are in the habit of finding books on the library shelves after arrival—the group which has been characterized as “random selectors,” and which makes up 55 per cent of the patronage.

We know that such readers are most likely to be housewives, or clerks and stenographers, fairly young, and usually possessed of a high school education. They visit the



public library on an average of once every two weeks, coming to return books and to withdraw others, a large proportion of which are fiction. On the whole, they appreciate the library service and think it is pretty good, but they *would* like to see more new, popular books, and more helpful books on shorthand, accounting, and allied subjects. The clerks and stenographers in the group have beforehand some sort of idea of what books they want and are disappointed to find so many of them out in circulation. The housewives who would like to glance over the newspaper are irritated to find it being read by some previously and permanently installed male. They find that the magazines are being similarly utilized and that most of the desirable, circulating copies have already been withdrawn. Having read a favorable review, or having discussed with someone that new novel of upper-class Chinese life, they request the book and are told by an assistant that the library does not own a copy. The clerks and stenographers, on the other hand, have found a book on the subject they want to read about, but, unfortunately, the book is out of date or is too elementary or doesn't look as though it would make very good reading. Remembering something they wanted to see in a certain popular magazine, both groups discover that the library does not subscribe to it—a fact which serves to recall to them that the library does not have a copy of a certain newspaper, either. However, this failure is of slight importance. Since none of these readers has engaged to a great extent in any kind of reference work, and since none of them has had obscure or involved questions to ask assistants, such oral aid as they have required has been satisfactory. Once again, the composite reader, for purposes of illustration, transcends the limits of patience and forbearance.

To summarize briefly, dissatisfactions of readers are directly proportionate to the complexity of their activities in the library. These activities are largely determined by factors inherent in the reader's personality—sex, age, education, and occupation, the latter two being the most important determinants. Taking the clientele as a whole, 85 per cent of all dissatisfaction relates to the library's failure or inability to own and duplicate in sufficient numbers the books needed for public use. Failure to stock desired books and newspapers is of less importance to the clientele than failure to duplicate the present collections, but there seems to be a need for the inclusion of more new magazines to satisfy public demands and changing tastes. The book collection is reported to be inadequate for about 10 per cent of the entire clientele.

Younger readers are more critical of the book collections than are older readers. The less educated complain of dissatisfactions incurred in the use of magazines and newspapers, while the better educated experience more dissatisfaction in the use of the books. Deficiencies in purchase and duplication are reported most frequently by clerks and stenographers, professionals, skilled tradesmen, and students, groups which use the library heavily for reference work or for academic and vocational purposes. The behavior of the unemployed shows this group to be the least satisfied with the oral assistance given them, and less satisfied than other readers with the present selection of newspapers. Dissatisfactions concerning newspapers and magazines are confined mainly to the older, less educated, and more manual occupational groups, although housewives indicate that they would like to read the newspaper if given more opportunity.

## THE REFERENCE DEPARTMENT

Since one of the objectives in repeating the survey experiment in the Reference Department was to seek indications of changes since 1934, the questionnaire used was briefer than that used in the branches. Its aim was to find out what kinds of people use a large reference library; what purposes govern their reading; whether or not they know what they want when they come to the library; how regularly they use it; how much assistance they require; whether the library owns or fails to own the books they need; and whether or not they have difficulty in using the catalogs.

To review these points in succession, it was found that the heaviest use of the library as a whole is made by readers engaged in independent study. Forty-one per cent of all the readers reported that this motive accounted for their presence in the building. This per cent varies among the divisions from 54 per cent in the Jewish Division to 28 per cent of the readers in the Patents Room.

The necessity for reading and study in connection with daily work brought 39 per cent of the people to the Reference Department. Here, the situation in the divisions is reversed; almost 72 per cent of the readers using the Patents Room were doing so for this purpose, while over half of the readers in the Chemistry Room, and 39 per cent of those in the Art Division were similarly engaged.

Recreational reading lures 11 per cent of the readers. The Periodicals Division, the Slavonic Division, the Jewish Division, the Music Division, and the Main Reading Room attract most of those who read for pleasure. No reader in the Patents Room reported being there for recreation.

Although the Reference Department is closed to stu-

dents, except in special cases, 8 per cent of the total readers reported using the library for school work. The largest number of these were concentrated in the Art Division and in the Main Reading Room.

When the reasons which brought readers to the library were grouped under the descriptive headings "intellectual, vocational, and recreational," and the results of both surveys were compared, it was seen that between 1934 and 1936 there was a noticeable increase in the vocational use of the Art and the Economics Divisions, while Science, Chemistry, Patents, and Periodicals reported decreases in this type of use.

Recreational reading decreased heavily in Art, Economics, and in Science and Technology toward the end of the depression. General recreational reading for all divisions decreased 4.5 per cent. General vocational reading likewise showed a decrease for the department as a whole. The slack was taken up by an increase in the amount of independent study, or intellectual reading, indicating that some of the practical necessities which drove people to books during the worst of the depression may have lessened as the economic skies cleared.

Commenting, in *People and Print*, on the table from which this information is drawn, Dr. Waples says: "The readers here represented are perhaps the best sample obtainable of urban residents who take reading seriously. Further analysis of reading changes in such groups by individual students would be desirable and practicable."<sup>2</sup>

Seventy-six per cent of the readers described themselves as regular visitors to the library. About 3 per cent of the total readers interviewed were making their first visit to

<sup>2</sup> ("University of Chicago Studies in Library Science"; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1937), p. 182.

the library while the survey was in progress. Since these figures tally closely with those of 1934, we can put considerable credence in them.

In regular patronage the Patents Room ranks first, and the Periodicals Division is second. The Jewish Division, Technology, and Music attract more irregular visitors than do other divisions.

In both years, between 40 and 45 per cent of the readers reported that they asked for assistance while using the library. In the Art Division, where readers were found to be the most uncertain of the specific book or materials they wanted, the greatest amount of assistance was required. Forty-eight per cent of the readers using the Patents Room, and 46 per cent of those using the Jewish Division asked for aid. In the Periodicals Division, where were found the greatest number of readers who knew what they wanted before they came to the library, only 20 per cent required the help of a staff member.

Over three-fourths, or 79 per cent, of all readers reported that the library owned the book which they wanted—an astonishingly high figure in consideration of the myriad demands made upon the collection. Nine per cent of the readers in the Slavonic Division, 7 per cent in the Main Reading Room, 6 per cent in Economics, and 4 per cent in both Jewish and Art, reported that these divisions did not own the books they were seeking.

Nearly 66 per cent of the readers came to the Reference Department to consult books, the author and title of which they already knew. The remainder came for information or for recreation, without any specific book in mind. It has already been noted that readers in the Periodicals Division were surest of their sources, while those in the Art Division seemed the most uncertain.

Speaking of catalogs in larger libraries, the Director of the New York Public Library said in the *Library Quarterly*:

The card catalog is admirable for keeping its information up to date in a form readily used if the reader has accurate knowledge of the precise title or the precise phase of the subject he is looking for. The latter side of the problem, however, is complicated by the fact that he must be sure his definition of his phase is the same as that of the maker of the catalog. The reader has the difficulty of fingering large masses of cards. The librarian has the difficulty of either keeping these cards clean or reprinting them when worn and soiled. The card catalog is unquestionably elastic, flexible, a devourer of space and time in consultation.<sup>3</sup>

In using the catalogs of the Reference Department, about 7 per cent of the readers reported difficulty. When asked to tell why, a great many wrote that the cards were often illegible, and numerous others expressed bewilderment in attempting to locate a single entry under such a broad heading as "U.S. Government," for example.

In the divisions the most difficulty was experienced in using catalogs in the Chemistry and Technology Rooms, and in the Slavonic, Jewish, and Music Divisions—all of which call for a measure of specialized knowledge on the part of the reader. Readers were further requested to write down the precise subject which they were investigating. In this way, it would be possible to compare the vocabulary of the reader with that of the library's official list of subject headings. Unfortunately, time has been lacking for the completion of this ambitious task, which it is hoped some future student will undertake.

<sup>3</sup> H. M. Lydenberg, "Tomorrow," *Library Quarterly*, VII (1937), 306-7.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE FREQUENCY OF VISITING

THE frequency with which readers visit the public library is a good index of the reliance they place upon it. Few people continue to patronize an institution which gives them little or nothing in return. Rates of visiting do not, obviously, show anything about the quality or importance of that reliance, since one person might visit the library but once a year to discover information vital to the whole community, while another drops in daily to doze over the morning *Times* or pick his teeth in genial abstraction.

For another reason the rate of visiting is a useful descriptive index. As this chapter will try to demonstrate, the library caters to three publics—three classes of readers who, when viewed in the mass, not only tend to visit the library at stated intervals but also tend to use it for similar purposes and with similar results.

In dealing with readers in the branches of the Circulation Department we have separated them into two groups, the regular and the irregular borrowers. A regular borrower is defined as one who comes to the library as often as once a month; an irregular borrower as one who visits less frequently than once a month, and who may come but once in the course of a year.

In Figure 5 the visiting habits of the regular borrowers are depicted. These people visit anywhere from once a week to once a month. Many readers living near branch

libraries visit several times a week, and many others reported using the library every day.

As seen in the figure, a third of the regular borrowers make weekly trips to the library. Almost half of them visit in accordance with the normal two-week loan period. About 20 per cent confine their library contacts to monthly visits, and 3.4 per cent of all readers interviewed use the library less frequently than once a month. About 1.5

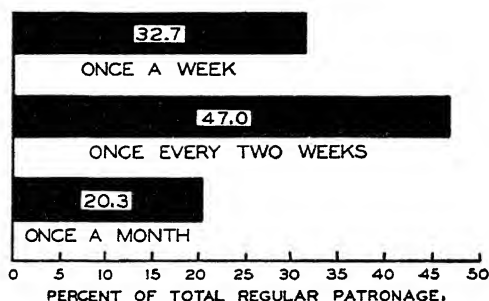


FIG. 5.—Rate of visiting of the regular patrons\*

\* Since the survey lasted only one week, those readers accustomed to visiting the public library every two weeks had only one chance in two of being represented in the sample. Those accustomed to visiting once a month had only one chance in four. Obviously a correction was needed if a true picture of library attendance was to be given. This was accomplished by multiplying the biweekly visitors by two, the monthly visitors by four.

per cent of all readers were making their initial visits while the survey was in progress. Whether this figure represents an accurate estimate of the increase in new patrons is not known.

Accessibility is undoubtedly a potent conditioner of the total use made of a library, as measured by books circulated, and of the frequency with which the library is visited. If a man lives across the street from a branch of the city library system, he is much more likely to use it frequently than if he must make a tiresome trip on the subway. The effect of distance on library use has been studied



in St. Louis by Margaret L. Pilcher<sup>1</sup> in 1916 and more recently by James Wert.<sup>2</sup> Wert found that the per cent of books withdrawn from a local branch library decreases at a rate of about 6 per cent a block. In the block nearest the building, 68 per cent of the books read were borrowed from the library; in the tenth block, only 13 per cent. Similarly, the number of adults holding library cards in their own names decreased at a rate of approximately 2 per cent a block. Thirty-one per cent of the adults in the first block owned cards; in the tenth block only 20 per cent held cards in their own names.

Figure 6, based on material prepared for Douglas Waples by the Seward Park branch of the New York Public Library, furnishes a pictorial example of the effect of proximity on registration. Were it not for intervening factors which tend to limit housing facilities, such as warehouses, stores, and office buildings, or the presence of parks and natural barriers, it seems fair to assume that the ideal branch library, if set down in the center of a homogeneous community, would react like a stone dropped into still water. Ripples of registrants would radiate centrifugally, lessening as they widened, fading altogether unless taken up by the radiations of an adjoining branch.

Thus, although everyone in a large city might theoretically enjoy adequate library service, it is frequently much more available to some than to others. People living in inaccessible neighborhoods and unserved areas may well have as few real library opportunities as do those living in isolated rural communities. The unevenness of city li-

<sup>1</sup> *Who's Who among Readers in the St. Louis Public Library* (St. Louis: St. Louis Public Library, 1923). Pp. 37.

<sup>2</sup> "The Effectiveness of the Public-School-housed Library Branch," *Library Quarterly*, VII (1937), 537-45.

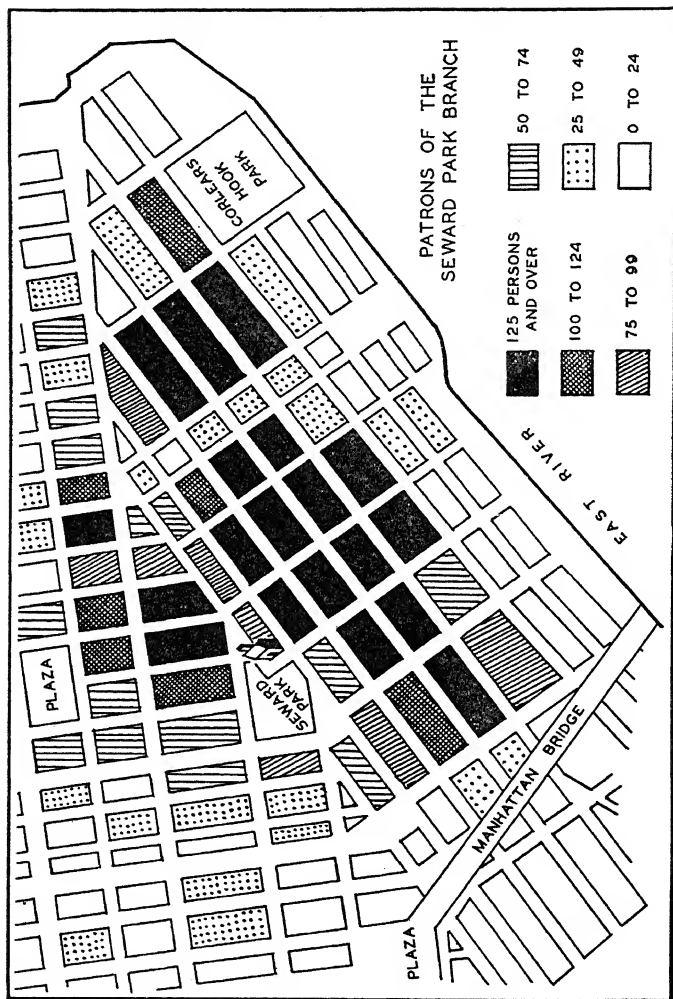


Fig. 6.—Distribution of library patrons, Seward Park branch

brary service was perhaps most strikingly brought out in a recent survey conducted under the auspices of the Chicago Library Club.<sup>3</sup>

In the discussion which follows, it must be remembered that we are talking about the regular borrowers only. The irregular borrowers and the new visitors are reserved for later consideration.

Sex, age, education, and occupation affect visiting rates to a marked extent. For instance, men are inclined to visit the library more frequently than women. Women's use follows more nearly the traditional two-week loan period. Older people as a group visit more frequently than do younger readers—almost 60 per cent of those over forty-five classed themselves as weekly visitors. The younger readers below the age of thirty visit most often at the two-weeks level, while the middle group of readers—those from thirty to forty-five—generally visit about once a month.

Readers with the least educational background, that is, grade school, are the most frequent visitors. Those in high school or who have had high school training constitute the largest percentage of biweekly visitors; and people in college, or with college training, visit most at the once-a-month level. The frequency of the patrons' visits, when examined in terms of educational status, is a clean progression from the best- to the least-equipped group.

Occupational condition gives these facts a more familiar meaning. To find at which period the majority in each group visits the library, the groups were divided into three levels in accordance with the rate of visiting. It is interesting from this scheme to find that the two extremes are

<sup>3</sup> Leon Carnovsky, "The Evaluation of Public-Library Facilities," in L. R. Wilson, ed., *Library Trends*, pp. 286-309.

the unemployed, the majority of whom visit once a week, and the professional people, the majority of whom visit once a month, or less.

It is plain from the record that the greatest number of people who visit the library once a week are either middle-aged or elderly, have a minimum of educational experience, and are to a great extent unemployed. Cartoonists and humorists have often stereotyped these readers as comic figures. In speaking of the role of the library during the depression, R. L. Duffus points out that the public "did not see the library as it really has been during the hard times—a relief agency almost as essential as those which provided food, shelter, medical care, and clothing."<sup>4</sup>

That the library was, and still is, all of this for many people was amply shown in hundreds of comments made by readers, of which the following, from a middle-aged W.P.A. worker, is illustrative. He says:

"Another reason that has made this branch a treat is that one may always be sure of a quiet corner where one can browse in peace. It has been a haven of refuge in this city of a million noises, and during a period when unemployment has left every nerve on edge. I can't say enough for it. It may sound exaggerated, but if you have been stalking through the streets and seen the chaos and confusion around the Sixth Avenue employment offices, and then dropped in to this quiet, kindly retreat, you'll understand what this branch has been for many."

Conversely, the frequency of the visits of the best-equipped group, the professionals, is in inverse ratio to that of the unemployed readers. In the rankings used, professionals ranked eighth at the once-a-week level, sixth

<sup>4</sup> R. L. Duffus, *Our Starving Libraries* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1933), p. 2.

at the biweekly level, and first at the once-a-month level. Thus, for these two diverse social groups, the library has a different meaning, performs different functions. To the one it has the more immediate function of a quasi-club where the daily paper may be read, where interesting magazines and books may be perused freely, and where leisure can be localized. To the other, it has a more remote function: it is a municipal service to which one can turn for aid in solving certain personal or vocational problems, or which one can use as a supplementary source for the enrichment of voluntary leisure.

Between the most and least frequent visitors is a middle group which comes to the library every two weeks. Composed primarily of younger people of a high school background, this group is led by clerks and stenographers. In all probability, for these people the library's greatest function is to serve as an agency for social mobility, supplying the means of vocational and social advancement, personal adjustment, and worth-while use of leisure. The numerous requests these readers made for new and additional books on shorthand, accounting, machinery of all kinds, and similar subjects, attest to this fact, and it is significant that in the Reference Department the catalog cards having the shortest life are those relative to accounting and sex.

Typical of the comments made by readers of this group is one from a young high school graduate, now employed as a secretary. "I've found the library to be the foremost source for keeping up and broadening my knowledge. I would like to broaden my vocabulary and improve my tone of speech through the use of books, as I have already found my lack of speech mastery a business and social handicap."

Students vary less than any other group in the rate at which they visit the library, although there is a tendency for high school students to come more frequently than do students in college. Most of the housewives visit once a week or twice a month. It is noteworthy that the better educated the group, the less frequently its library-using members come to the library. Skilled tradesmen and unskilled laborers visit weekly, while professionals, and white-collar workers visit the least frequently of any occupational group.

When we correlate the rate of visiting with the things visitors do within the library walls, we find that the majority of the once-a-week visitors engage in activities which pertain to the reading-room function rather than to the circulation function of the public library. Consequently, this group expresses least unsatisfactory library experience.

At the two-weeks' level, the circulation of books comes into its own. Finding books on the shelf, withdrawing predetermined books, reserving books, and asking for help are the major activities of borrowers whose visiting habits follow the normal loan period. This group reports the highest amount of partial satisfaction in the use of the library.

The most characteristic activities of the once-a-month visitors—a group composed mainly of professionals, business people, and college students—are reserving books and consulting reference books. This group reports the highest amount of dissatisfaction.

In summary, we might expand our evidence and say that in the library system of any large city, the following will be found to be more or less true: (1) that most readers of grammar school background will visit the library once a week, make the reading of newspapers their chief

# THE FREQUENCY OF VISITING

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TABLE 5

CHARACTERISTICS OF LIBRARY PATRONS—CIRCULATION DEPARTMENT

Group Characteristics	Once-a-Week Visitors (33 Per Cent of Regular Patronage)	Biweekly Visitors (47 Per Cent of Regular Patronage)	Monthly Visitors (20 Per Cent of Regular Patronage)
Age.....	Over 45	15-30	30-45
Education....	Grammar school	High school	College
Occupation (ranked)....	1. Unemployed 2. Housewives 3. Students* 4. Unknown 5. Unskilled laborers	1. Clerks and stenographers 2. Skilled tradesmen 3. Shopkeepers and salesmen 4. Students* 5. Housewives	1. Professionals 2. Shopkeepers and salesmen 3. Clerks and stenographers 4. Students* 5. Unknown
Library activities (ranked).	1. Read newspapers 2. Read magazines 3. Consulted reference books 4. Read books 5. Asked for help	1. Found a book on the shelves 2. Withdrew predetermined book 3. Miscellaneous activities 4. Asked for help 5. Read a book	1. Miscellaneous activities 2. Asked for help 3. Withdrew predetermined book 4. Consulted reference materials 5. Read a book
Causes of dissatisfaction (ranked)....	1. Library lacked magazine 2. Library lacked newspapers 3. Magazine was out 4. Assistant could not answer question 5. Books were inadequate (Reported highest degree of satisfaction)	1. Book was out 2. Newspaper was in use 3. Library lacked book 4. Books were inadequate 5. Magazine was out (Reported highest degree of partial satisfaction)	1. Newspaper was in use 2. Library lacked book 3. Book was out 4. Magazine was out 5. Books were inadequate (Reported highest degree of unsatisfactory use)

\* The excessive representation of students in the patronage accounts for their appearance in every level of visiting.

activity, and that this group will be loaded with unemployed, unskilled laborers, skilled tradesmen, high school students, and some housewives; (2) that the majority of readers of high school background will visit once every two weeks, will make the withdrawal of books selected at random their chief activity, and this group will be composed mainly of housewives, clerks and stenographers, and high school students and will account for the greatest turnover in circulation; and (3) that most readers of college background will visit approximately once a month, will engage in a variety of complex activities, and that in this group will be found the professional and business folk and the college students.

In Table 5 a rough schematization of this summary is presented. In examining these three publics, it must be remembered that in each case we are talking about the modal or average reader. No ordinary person would fit neatly into any of these levels, nor would any large grouping of people. But when a multitude of facts about a huge sampling of library patrons are put together in the language of statistics, certain characteristics inherent in the people they represent produce a pattern of result.

#### IRREGULAR BORROWERS AND NEW VISITORS

The irregular borrowers are very like those who visit the library at least once a month. The majority of them are over thirty, well trained educationally, and engaged in business or in the professions. From their activities in the library and from the features of the service which cause them dissatisfaction, it is plain that this group is inclined to regard the public library as a supplementary source for books which home and rental libraries cannot supply, and as a civic information service.



The characteristics of the readers who made their first visits to the library while the survey was in progress are interesting because they indicate the library's saturation with one kind of clientele and its gradual penetration into another. Among the new visitors there were more unskilled laborers and skilled tradesmen and fewer students and housewives. This strikes a note of encouragement, since unskilled laborers as a group are everywhere under-represented among the registrants of public libraries. In New York, for instance, in 1932, unskilled laborers, representing 6.8 per cent of the population of the service area of the library accounted for only 1.6 per cent of the registrants of six branch libraries.

That the majority of the people making their first visit to the library have only a grade school education, are between thirty and forty years of age, and are engaged in trades and unskilled labor, may be partly owing to the organized forces of the adult education movement.

## CHAPTER V

### THE USE OF THE CATALOG

THE catalog is no more and no less than a conventionalized device for interpreting the resources of the library to the reader and to the staff. A sensitive instrument and highly expensive to maintain, theories of its function, construction, and probable value to the public have occasioned more professional controversy than any other single phase of library work. For almost half a century librarians have sought to instil in readers a sense of the importance of the catalog. From the children's room through the graduate school and after, there is a constant process of indoctrination, the result of which, while widely speculated upon, has rarely been objectively measured.

How much use the readers of a public library system make of the catalog, and what kinds of readers find it most and least useful were two questions which this survey set out to answer. Readers were asked to indicate whether they had used the catalog during the survey period, and also whether they had ever used it in the past.

In reply, 37 per cent of the people who came to the branch libraries in eight days revealed that they had selected and withdrawn books and engaged in reference work without the aid of the catalog. Six per cent of the total number stated that they had never used the catalog for any purpose.

Because it presents the most striking picture, the extent to which the catalog is used by occupational groups fur-

nishes the best frame for discussion. In Figure 7 is shown the proportion of each occupational group using the catalog during the course of the survey week. Those readers who admit never having used it are depicted in Figure 8.

In Figure 7, students are seen to account for the greater part of the use, roughly 44 per cent. Even more than the number of student registrants, or the number of books

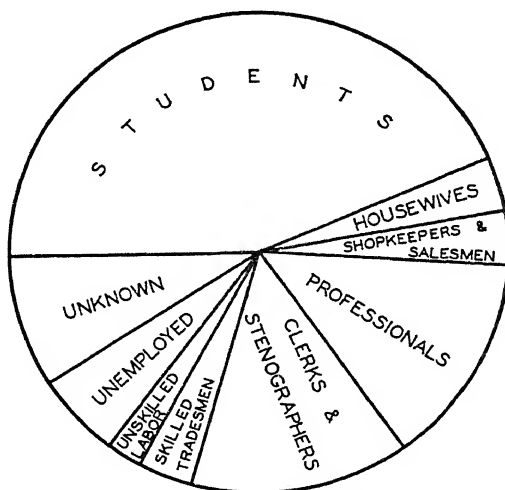


FIG. 7.—Users of catalog during one week

deposited in school collections, this figure is a measurement of the library's co-operation with the public school.

The black bars of Figure 8 constitute a measurement of the intellectual response the general public makes to the library, for it is hardly conceivable that a serious, sustained use can be made of a book collection without eventual recourse to even the poorest or simplest catalog.

In the percentage of readers who have never used this tool there is exhibited a nice dichotomy between those of a

lower educational and occupational status and those of a higher. Taking the unknown group as the dead center, it appears that housewives, unskilled laborers, and skilled tradesmen not only have made less use of the catalog during the sample survey period, but, with the inclusion of the unemployed, also report the highest amount of nonuse in the past. On the other end of the scale, clerks and stenographers, shopkeepers and salesmen, professionals, and students

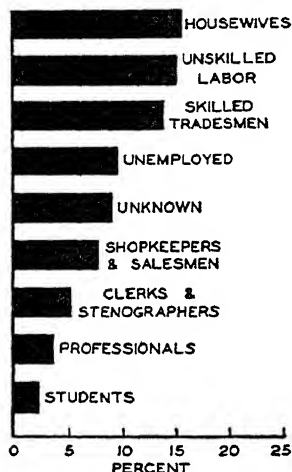


FIG. 8.—Occupation of patrons who have never used the catalog.

report the least nonuse. Since these groups are normally the best educated in our society, it is obvious that educational background and the school situation are definite, measurable influences in determining the amount of use to which the catalog is put by different kinds of people.

Men, as a group, resort to the catalog more frequently than do women. This may be partially owing to business and vocational conditions which accustom men to a wider use of directories and files, etc. Eighty per cent of the readers using the catalog during a week were below the age of thirty, and 70 per cent were below the age of twenty-five. That younger people, regardless of whether they are students or not, use the catalog more than their elders is shown in the per cent of each age-group which has never used the catalog. Four per cent of the readers below the age of thirty, 11 per cent between thirty and forty-five, and 17 per cent over forty-five are strangers to this library aid.

The effects of training in the use of the library catalog are emphasized when we look at the educational background of these readers. Over a fourth of those having only grammar school training have never used the catalog, in contrast to 7 per cent of the high-school-trained and 2 per cent of the college-trained readers.

Since satisfactory library use is dependent on many factors besides the mere use of the catalog, it is next to impossible to estimate, except in an indirect way, to what extent the use of the catalog leads to a more satisfying library experience. We do know, however, that 10 per cent of the readers who did not use the catalog failed to find what they wanted, and we are free to speculate on how much of this failure could have been prevented if the catalog had been brought into play.

As is to be expected, reference work sends more people to the catalog than any other one activity. Withdrawing predetermined books is closely connected with the use of the catalog, and it is interesting to see the statistics pointing to the groups who select books at random from the shelves as people who use the catalog even less than those readers who use the library exclusively as a reading room.

Surprisingly, the majority of the readers who claimed that assistants failed to answer questions satisfactorily also used the catalog. The explanation may be that such readers, failing to find what they want in the catalog, turn to the assistants for aid; or that the assistants, when faced with unanswerable or hopelessly formulated questions, send inquirers to the catalog as a means of last resort. The only other major cause of dissatisfaction which is directly correlated with use of the catalog concerns the book stock and reflects the fact that the best-trained staff and the

most skilfully made catalog cannot prevail against depleted shelves.

Moreover, it is noteworthy that the major complaint of readers who have never used the catalog is that the library does not own the book they want. It is very likely that many of these readers assume that if a book is not on the shelf it is not owned by the library, and that many more are unaware that most books can be secured through the interbranch loan service if they are willing to wait for them. Teaching such groups as housewives, unskilled laborers, skilled tradesmen, and the unemployed to use the catalog would not only enrich their library experience but would also lessen the verbal demands made upon floor assistants.

To summarize: it was shown that during an eight-day period 63 per cent of the readers used the library's catalogs and that 6 per cent reported never having used it. It was also demonstrated that educational status is the chief determining factor leading to catalog use, and that the best-educated groups—business people, professionals, white-collar workers, and students—use the catalog more than do other types of people. Housewives, unskilled laborers, skilled tradesmen, and the unemployed were relatively unacquainted with this important tool.

It was further indicated that the more complex the activities of readers, the more they are disposed to rely on the catalog, and that as a consequence they find more dissatisfactions with certain features of the service, the most notable of which relates to the paucity of materials.

#### THE CATALOG AS LIBRARY PATRONS SEE IT

Bring two librarians together and they will usually discuss literature. Bring three librarians together and the

talk will turn to readers. Bring a group of librarians together and sooner or later conversation will get around to problems of cataloging and what to do about the catalog.

The layman fails to realize the years of careful nurturing, the skill, money, sweat, and intelligence that go into the making and maintenance of the average card catalog. Because it is so consuming of all these elements, the catalog at one time in library development became the focus of a veritable cult, the members of which were willing to sacrifice the common reader on the altar of arbitrary rulings and sheer pedantry. But as the catalog grew into a Frankenstein's monster and as adult education came into vogue, a reaction set in, and it has become somewhat fashionable at library institutes and conventions and in library literature to minimize the older emphasis on cataloging and to question many things about the instrument itself which were formerly taken for granted.

In one of the best of the criticisms, Willard O. Mishoff considers the catalog from the reader's point of view. Some of the faults he finds with it are its failure to follow the current terminology of the majority; its failure to correspond with the filing systems already understood by the millions who use telephone directories and card filing in business; and its inconsistency in the matter of entry. He concludes that "in too many cases catalogers have read books but have not read people's minds. Hence they have not considered popular whims and caprices."<sup>1</sup>

Of the four hundred readers who responded to the library's open request for comments about the catalog, 53 per cent made complaints identical with those enumerated by Mishoff. The fact that the filing does not follow the

<sup>1</sup> "The Catalog from a Reader's Viewpoint," *Library Journal*, LVII (1932), 1037.

telephone book and the practices in business routines, that the subject headings often smack of a bygone era, that there are not enough "see" cards, that fiction is not classified, that biography has a letter instead of a number, and that cards often contain confusing and esoteric notations—all make for bewilderment. Many readers complained of failure to find books listed under their titles. "I really think titles should be listed," says a housewife. "Most people read a book and recommend it with absolutely no thought of the author." Policies concerning *noms de plume* worry many.

The most common complaint referred not so much to the catalog's deficiencies as to the fact that readers do not know how to locate books after they have found them listed. "I spend a lot of time searching for the book I found in the catalog," a salesman writes. "If there were large numbers or marks placed over the shelves in a visible position, and if the cards in the catalog indicated exactly where in the library I could find the books, a good deal of useless wandering and searching would be eliminated." Another man, a chiropodist, adds: "There should be some method whereby after one gets the book numbers from the catalog he can go immediately to the shelf where the book ought to be."

Every such reader who uses the catalog and then must wait and ask an assistant to direct him to the proper shelf wastes both his time and that of the staff member. In chapter iii, the general desire for floor plans, lucid guides, and more clearly marked shelves was brought out in other connections.

Many readers seem to regard the catalog as an instrument of frustration and are willing to forego it entirely in favor of the loose, topical arrangement used by book-



stores and rental libraries. Typical of these comments is this from an author who says that he uses many books in research "and it takes too much time to look them up in the catalog. If you would please place labels on all the shelves and tell what kind of books are there, it would be very easy for all of us to find the books we are looking for." Some readers state frankly that they have acquired the habit of depending on floor assistants and no longer go to the bother of searching for their books in the catalog.

Others, because of long familiarity with a neighborhood collection, cease to need aids to its use. A bank clerk remarks, "I have been a member of this branch for 25 years and have always found the material and service pleasant and satisfactory. I am so well acquainted with the volumes that I do not need the catalog service."

Twenty-three per cent of the readers reported physical obstructions in the use of the catalog. One woman characterized it as "often crowded and always uncomfortable to use." Improperly arranged and disorganized trays brought forth the most adverse comment. "People take the index trays out and put them in the wrong place" is a recurring theme. Readers suggest large numbers or a color system to make incorrect replacement glaringly evident. Others recounted the difficulty of manipulating tightly packed cards or of trying to read those typed in feeble ink or overlaid with grime.

Twelve per cent of the readers confessed they were ignorant of how to use the catalog and didn't know how to get instruction. "I have never had the system explained to me, and the attendants are always too busy to bother," said a woman bank clerk. Several high school students were among those who asked either that instruction be given by the librarian or that charts be placed near the

catalog to explain its use and to give the meaning of "the initials next to the book numbers."

Ten per cent of the readers returned comments of unqualified praise, recounting incidents in which the catalog had led them to some particularly important bit of information. Writers and older people in the higher educational brackets tend to be especially appreciative of its utility. Two per cent of the readers said that they did not know there was such a thing as a catalog in the library.

## CHAPTER VI

### WHAT LIBRARY PATRONS READ AND WHERE THEY GET IT

THERE are in the United States more literate people than any one country has produced at any one moment in all of past history. Paralleling this unprecedented popular literacy has been the rapid multiplication of things to read and the increasing necessity for modern man to rely on the symbols of nonoral communication. Only half a century ago industrial leaders could rise to the heights of the financial world with a bare knowledge of the printed page. Today such a thing would be next to impossible. The modern man's ability to read and understand print is no less important than was his primitive forebear's ability to read quickly and accurately the foot-pocked record of game on the move.

With the lifting of the fog of general illiteracy and the emergence of the mass publication, reading has become a powerful social force, enabling the propagandist to hold the attention of a continent where yesterday he could reach but a scattered few. In war and in peace we have discovered new and terrifying ways of utilizing a skill which the republic has unceasingly labored to make universal.

Sociology has been strangely negligent of reading as a field for investigation, and the fact that there exists any sort of sociology of reading is mainly owing to the efforts of scattered psychologists, educators, and librarians. To

mention a few who have made positive contributions to the general field there are in psychology, R. L. Pyke and Magdalen Vernon; in education, Buswell, Gray, Leary, and Bryson; and in library science, John Cotton Dana, Joseph L. Wheeler, and Douglas Waples.

Discounting those who have something to sell, librarians and teachers are the most immediately concerned with what people read—the librarian more so than the teacher, since reading is his staple commodity, and since he is responsible for reading in its quantitative aspects as well as its qualitative effects.

Hence, within the compass of this survey, not only were we concerned with seeking out the average library patron as a potential borrower of the library's books, but we were also interested in him as a reading man who obtains a variety of publications from a variety of sources—the corner newsstand, the drugstore, the rental library and bookstore, subscriptions, home collections, book clubs, and friends, as well as from a branch of the New York Public Library. And so we asked him to tell us a bit about the tastes and habits which motivate his reading urge.

Studies such as that made by Dr. Ralph E. Ellsworth, the librarian of the University of Colorado,<sup>1</sup> have attempted to identify the publications read by the general public and, by tracking each down to its original source, to reveal how agencies differ not only in the patrons they attract but also in the quality of the literature they distribute. No such refined analysis was desirable or possible in this study. Our intentions were much simpler, for we felt that if we could ascertain what outside sources library patrons

<sup>1</sup> "The Distribution of Books and Magazines in Selected Communities" (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Graduate Library School, University of Chicago, 1937).

use most and how these sources rank in order of preference, we would achieve a rough approximation of the role the public library plays in relation to the other agencies disseminating literature of various kinds. Furthermore, we felt that if we knew more about what patrons read from all sources, we could obtain an equally rough but valuable indication of the intellectual caliber of that portion of the public which is library-minded, to use a connotative but distasteful phrase.

Accordingly, readers were asked to name the sources used for obtaining books within the two months preceding the survey. They were also asked to indicate what magazines they read regularly; what books had been read within the past week, regardless of source; and what agency was used most, less, and least for obtaining the books which had been read.

Out of a total of 15,730 persons responding, 47 per cent reported that they had withdrawn books from the public library. Twenty-four per cent had used academic libraries. Twelve per cent had borrowed from friends and relatives. Eight per cent had purchased books in stores; 5 per cent had used rental collections; and 2 per cent had used the libraries of clubs and organizations. It is significant of the times and of city life that only 0.7 per cent reported reading books from home collections, and less than 0.6 per cent reported using libraries attached to churches.

How the patrons of the New York Public Library compare with book readers in other parts of the country in their use of sources is shown in Table 6. The data are drawn from Wilson and Wight's *County Library Service in the South* and from unpublished community studies made for the Graduate Library School by Dr. Douglas Waples and others.

Since most of these studies are biased in favor of the public library, they fail to include certain elements of the book population, particularly upper-class readers who are generally less disposed to read at public expense and are more likely to use commercial sources and private collections. The data for the South relates to eleven counties in seven southern states in which Rosenwald demonstration libraries were located and do not, therefore, reflect conditions in the entire region. This is particularly true

TABLE 6  
SOURCES USED BY BOOK READERS IN  
VARIOUS COMMUNITIES

Community	Public Library	Rental Library	Friends	Stores	Other Sources
New York City . . . . .	47.0	5.0	12.0	8.0	28.0
Fraser Valley, B.C. . . . .	53.6	0.4	23.6	4.3	18.1
Morris County, N.J. . . . .	46.1	1.5	12.5	8.5	31.4
St. Louis, Mo. . . . .	65.5	5.6	7.7	10.0	11.2
South Chicago, Ill. . . . .	28.0	5.4	21.1	10.7	34.8
Southern states, Negro. . . . .	32.0	0.1	11.0	10.5	46.4
Southern states, white. . . . .	30.8	1.0	9.3	5.2	53.7

in the case of Negroes for whom there is scant provision for general or adequate library service.

The variations in the use of specific agencies are occasioned for the most part by the number of drugstores, rental libraries, bookstores, public libraries, and other outlets in the locality. Thus, rental libraries are used more by city dwellers for the obvious reason that there are few such agencies in rural areas. The inhabitants of residential St. Louis use their conveniently located branch libraries because they are relatively well-equipped and are near at hand. However, the steel workers of South Chicago have no public library within walking distance of their com-

munity; for this reason, if the will to read triumphs over fatigue and other factors, they are more likely to turn to what is at home or can be borrowed from friends than to journey to a distant branch of the Chicago Public Library. The greater reliance placed on home libraries by rural people and by people in underprivileged communities such as South Chicago is brought out in the high per cent of use shown under the heading "Other Sources," which in this case refers almost entirely to home collections. It is in this respect that New Yorkers differ most from book readers in other sections. However, studies of suburban towns outside the metropolitan area have shown the use of sources to be much the same as in smaller urbanized communities in other parts of the country.

The preference of New York library patrons for particular sources of book supply is demonstrated in the frequency with which each is used. Readers were asked to rank, first, second, and third the sources which had been correspondingly used during the past two months.

As Table 7 shows, 77 per cent of the readers designated the public library as the most frequently used source. Twenty per cent named it the second most frequently used, and 4 per cent, the third most used source of books. About 15 per cent of the readers used academic libraries as their first source, but twice as many reported them to be the secondary source. As secondary sources, academic libraries rank first, with public libraries second, friends third, stores fourth, and rental libraries fifth. Stores and rental libraries are the primary source for less than 5 per cent of all the readers. The third most frequently used sources are, in order: friends, stores, club and association libraries, and academic libraries. Book clubs, home collections, and church libraries, which hardly figure as primary

sources for books, become increasingly more important as second and third sources.

From all these sources library patrons reported reading 6,500 books in the course of a week. This represents 0.25 books per capita. In literary quality the books rank remarkably high, with the most worth while of the current best sellers topping the list. This is in sharp contrast to the literature which patrons suggest for inclusion in the

TABLE 7  
COMPARATIVE USE OF FIRST, SECOND, AND THIRD  
SOURCES OF BOOKS

Source	First Most Used Source (Per Cent)	Second Most Used Source (Per Cent)	Third Most Used Source (Per Cent)
Public library.....	77.40	20.27	4.35
Academic libraries.....	14.71	37.34	10.37
Rental libraries.....	2.63	8.15	7.90
Friends.....	2.26	19.81	33.10
Stores.....	2.07	11.08	28.13
Home, office, etc.....	0.40	0.97	0.53
Club and association libraries.....	0.30	1.22	11.54
Book clubs.....	0.20	0.68	2.75
Church libraries.....	0.03	0.48	1.33
Total.....	100.00	100.00	100.00

library, as shown in chapter iv, wherein popular tastes appear to run somewhat below the library's standards of book selection. It is unfortunate that this bibliography of public reading has lost the piquancy of currency. However, its historical value, as an indication of what the average literate American was reading in the year 1936, warrants its partial inclusion in this book.

In a general dragnet survey few people report reading the same title, although many may report different books



written by the same author. For example, out of the thousands of readers in the branch libraries only 119 reported reading the current favorite, *It Can't Happen Here*, within the preceding week. However, over four thousand titles were reported which had had only a single reader during the same time. In listing the most widely read books we have limited ourselves to those titles read by ten or more readers. Also, to increase the usefulness of the list, the sex of the readers of each book is given. It is interesting to note the pronounced preference of men for nonfiction works, and it is encouraging to see standard books and old favorites holding their own against momentary best sellers. The strong influence which the stage and films exert on reading is reflected in the number who reported books like *A Tale of Two Cities* and *Pride and Prejudice*, both playing local theaters at the time of the study.

Of the 672 titles reported by four or more persons only 7, or 1.32 per cent, were not owned by some branch of the Circulation Department.

The librarian's difficulty in keeping to a course midway between what Carnovsky has termed the "value theory" and the "demand theory" of book selection is demonstrated by the disparity between the books apparently read by a large part of the patronage and the books which another large part would like to see added to library shelves. The latter group frankly prefers Zane Grey and Edgar Rice Burroughs. The former reads literature of substance and merit. Among the titles listed in Table 8 only seventeen belong to the Norris-Sabatini-Wodehouse school; only twenty-two, including the semiclassic Doyle, are mysteries or detectives; only nine are westerns; and less than a hundred would cause a *frisson* to travel the spine of a British reviewer.

TABLE 8  
MOST WIDELY READ BOOKS

AUTHOR AND TITLE	SEX OF READERS		
	Male	Female	Total
1. Sinclair Lewis, <i>It Can't Happen Here</i> .....	56	63	119
2. Charles Dickens, <i>A Tale of Two Cities</i> .....	30	36	66
3. Robert Briffault, <i>Europa</i> .....	21	41	62
4. Hervey Allen, <i>Anthony Adverse</i> .....	28	30	58
5. Walter Duranty, <i>I Write as I Please</i> .....	30	25	55
6. Franz Werfel, <i>The Forty Days of Musa Dagh</i> .....	24	28	52
7. Anne Lindbergh, <i>North to the Orient</i> .....	14	35	49
8. Pearl Buck, <i>The Good Earth</i> .....	19	24	43
9. Somerset Maugham, <i>Of Human Bondage</i> .....	15	25	40
10. Clarence Day, <i>Life with Father</i> .....	8	30	38
11. Ellen Glasgow, <i>Vein of Iron</i> .....	5	28	33
12. John Strachey, <i>The Coming Struggle for Power</i> .....	23	9	32
13. Jane Austen, <i>Pride and Prejudice</i> .....	8	22	30
14. Paul De Kruif, <i>Microbe Hunters</i> .....	18	12	30
15. Alexander Woollcott, <i>The Woollcott Reader</i> .....	10	19	29
16. Irving Stone, <i>Lust for Life</i> .....	12	17	29
17. Willa Cather, <i>Lucy Gayheart</i> .....	3	24	27
18. W. H. Hudson, <i>Green Mansions</i> .....	7	20	27
19. Chas. B. Nordhoff and J. N. Hall, <i>Mutiny on the Bounty</i> .....	17	10	27
20. Stark Young, <i>So Red the Rose</i> .....	8	19	27
21. Leo Tolstoi, <i>Anna Karenina</i> .....	6	20	26
22. Mazo de la Roche, <i>Jalna</i> .....	2	23	25
23. Thomas Wolfe, <i>Of Time and the River</i> .....	10	15	25
24. T. E. Lawrence, <i>Seven Pillars of Wisdom</i> .....	9	14	23
25. Stefan Zweig, <i>Mary, Queen of Scots</i> .....	8	15	23
26. Pearl Buck, <i>Sons</i> .....	7	15	22
27. Charles Dickens, <i>David Copperfield</i> .....	10	12	22
28. Thomas Wolfe, <i>Look Homeward, Angel</i> .....	13	9	22
29. Margaret A. Barnes, <i>Edna, His Wife</i> .....	1	20	21
30. Barry Benefield, <i>Valiant Is the Word for Carrie</i> ...	3	19	21
31. A. J. Cronin, <i>The Stars Look Down</i> .....	8	13	21
32. Sinclair Lewis, <i>Arrowsmith</i> .....	10	11	21
33. Theodore Dreiser, <i>An American Tragedy</i> .....	10	10	20
34. Alexandre Dumas, <i>The Three Musketeers</i> .....	14	6	20
35. George Eliot, <i>Silas Marner</i> .....	6	14	20
36. Arthur Kallet and F. J. Schlink, <i>100,000,000 Guinea Pigs</i> .....	11	9	20
37. Thomas Mann, <i>The Magic Mountain</i> .....	11	9	20

TABLE 8—Continued

AUTHOR AND TITLE	SEX OF READERS		
	Male	Female	Total
38. Stanley Walker, <i>Mrs. Astor's Horse</i> .....	11	9	20
39. Humphrey Cobb, <i>Paths of Glory</i> .....	11	8	19
40. Edna Ferber, <i>Come and Get It</i> .....	6	13	19
41. James Hilton, <i>Lost Horizon</i> .....	4	15	19
42. Sinclair Lewis, <i>Main Street</i> .....	10	9	19
43. Edmond Rostand, <i>Cyrano de Bergerac</i> .....	6	13	19
44. Vincent Sheean, <i>Personal History</i> .....	12	7	19
45. Shalom Asch, <i>Three Cities</i> .....	10	8	18
46. Rachel Field, <i>Time Out of Mind</i> .....	4	14	18
47. John Galsworthy, <i>The Forsyte Saga</i> .....	6	12	18
48. Fedor Dostoevskii, <i>Crime and Punishment</i> .....	14	3	17
49. Robert Forsythe, <i>Redder than the Rose</i> .....	9	8	17
50. Victor Hugo, <i>Les Misérables</i> .....	8	9	17
51. Sinclair Lewis, <i>Babbitt</i> .....	7	10	17
52. Sinclair Lewis, <i>Work of Art</i> .....	10	7	17
53. Rafael Sabatini, <i>Captain Blood</i> .....	7	10	17
54. George S. Viereck and Paul Eldridge, <i>My First Two Thousand Years; the Autobiography of the Wandering Jew</i> .....	9	8	17
55. Edith Wharton, <i>Ethan Frome</i> .....	3	14	17
56. Alexandre Dumas, <i>The Count of Monte Cristo</i> ....	7	9	16
57. Michael Gold, <i>Jews without Money</i> .....	6	10	16
58. Emil Ludwig, <i>Napoleon</i> .....	10	6	16
59. Romola Nijinsky, <i>Nijinsky</i> .....	6	10	16
60. William Seabrook, <i>Asylum</i> .....	7	9	16
61. Leo Tolstoi, <i>War and Peace</i> .....	9	7	16
62. Alexander Woolcott, <i>While Rome Burns</i> .....	9	7	16
63. Stefan Zweig, <i>Marie Antoinette</i> .....	4	12	16
64. Willa Cather, <i>My Antonia</i> .....	3	12	15
65. Mazo de la Roche, <i>Young Renny</i> .....	1	14	15
66. Gustave Flaubert, <i>Madame Bovary</i> .....	8	7	15
67. James Hilton, <i>Goodbye, Mr. Chips</i> .....	6	9	15
68. Emmuska Orczy, <i>The Scarlet Pimpernel</i> .....	6	9	15
69. Romain Rolland, <i>Jean Christophe</i> .....	5	10	15
70. Mari Sandoz, <i>Old Jules</i> .....	3	12	15
71. Booth Tarkington, <i>Alice Adams</i> .....	1	14	15
72. H. G. Wells, <i>The Outline of History</i> .....	8	7	15
73. Samuel Butler, <i>The Way of All Flesh</i> .....	7	7	14
74. Lloyd Douglas, <i>Green Light</i> .....	2	12	14
75. George Du Maurier, <i>Peter Ibbetson</i> .....	.....	14	14
76. Matthew Josephson, <i>The Robber Barons</i> .....	11	3	14

TABLE 8—Continued

AUTHOR AND TITLE	SEX OF READERS		
	Male	Female	Total
77. Walter Millis, <i>Road to War</i> .....	12	2	14
78. M. C. Phillips, <i>Skin Deep</i> .....	3	11	14
79. George Seldes, <i>Sawdust Caesar</i> .....	8	6	14
80. Jakob Wassermann, <i>The World's Illusion</i> .....	5	9	14
81. Pearl Buck, <i>A House Divided</i> .....	4	9	13
82. Willa Cather, <i>O Pioneers!</i> .....	4	9	13
83. A. J. Cronin, <i>Hatter's Castle</i> .....	3	10	13
84. Will Durant, <i>The Story of Philosophy</i> .....	9	4	13
85. Edna Ferber, <i>Show Boat</i> .....	5	8	13
86. Nathaniel Hawthorne, <i>The Scarlet Letter</i> .....	3	10	13
87. Josephine Lawrence, <i>If I Have Four Apples</i> .....	4	9	13
88. Sinclair Lewis, <i>Dodsworth</i> .....	3	10	13
89. Ludwig Lewisohn, <i>The Island Within</i> .....	7	6	13
90. Robert S. and Helen M. Lynd, <i>Middletown</i> .....	11	2	13
91. Erich M. Remarque, <i>All Quiet on the Western Front</i> ..	12	1	13
92. William Shakespeare, <i>Hamlet</i> .....	8	5	13
93. William Thackeray, <i>Vanity Fair</i> .....	9	4	13
94. Pearl Buck, <i>The Mother</i> .....	4	8	12
95. Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, <i>Don Quixote</i> .....	8	4	12
96. M. E. Chase, <i>Silas Crockett</i> .....	1	11	12
97. Edna Ferber, <i>So Big</i> .....	4	8	12
98. Lion Feuchtwanger, <i>Power</i> .....	7	5	12
99. Ellen Glasgow, <i>The Sheltered Life</i> .....	1	11	12
100. Oliver Goldsmith, <i>The Vicar of Wakefield</i> .....	6	6	12
101. Thomas Mann, <i>Joseph and His Brethren</i> .....	6	6	12
102. Chas. B. Nordhoff and J. N. Hall, <i>Men against the Sea</i>	9	3	12
103. Chas. B. Nordhoff and J. N. Hall, <i>Pitcairn's Island</i> ..	6	6	12
104. Shalom Asch, <i>Motke, the Thief</i> .....	7	4	11
105. Arnold Bennett, <i>Old Wives' Tale</i> .....	3	8	11
106. Charlotte Brontë, <i>Wuthering Heights</i> .....	.....	11	11
107. Alexis Carrel, <i>Man the Unknown</i> .....	5	6	11
108. Willa Cather, <i>Death Comes for the Archbishop</i> .....	7	4	11
109. Willa Cather, <i>Shadows on the Rock</i> .....	1	10	11
110. Samuel L. Clemens, <i>A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court</i> .....	8	3	11
111. Joseph Conrad, <i>Lord Jim</i> .....	4	7	11
112. Fedor Dostoevskii, <i>The Brothers Karamazov</i> .....	2	9	11
113. Knut Hamsun, <i>Growth of the Soil</i> .....	6	5	11
114. Thomas Hardy, <i>The Return of the Native</i> .....	4	7	11
115. Carlton Hayes, <i>A Political and Social History of Modern Europe</i> .....	7	4	11

TABLE 8—Continued

AUTHOR AND TITLE	SEX OF READERS		
	Male	Female	Total
116. A. T. Hobart, <i>Oil for the Lamps of China</i> .....	2	9	11
117. Lin Yutang, <i>My Country and My People</i> .....	1	10	11
118. Eugene O'Neill, <i>Strange Interlude</i> .....	3	8	11
119. Edgar Allan Poe, <i>Tales</i> .....	7	4	11
120. F. J. Schlink, <i>Eat, Drink and Be Wary</i> .....	5	6	11
121. Sir Walter Scott, <i>Ivanhoe</i> .....	5	6	11
122. Bernard Shaw, <i>Plays</i> .....	6	5	11
123. Lytton Strachey, <i>Queen Victoria</i> .....	6	5	11
124. Booth Tarkington, <i>Seventeen</i> .....	4	7	11
125. Hugh Walpole, <i>The Inquisitor</i> .....	2	9	11
126. Booker T. Washington, <i>Up from Slavery</i> .....	4	7	11
127. Pearl Buck, <i>East Wind, West Wind</i> .....	3	7	10
128. Winston Churchill, <i>The Crisis</i> .....	6	4	10
129. Isadora Duncan, <i>My Life</i> .....	2	8	10
130. Lauren Gilfillan, <i>I Went to Pit College</i> .....	6	4	10
131. H. Rider Haggard, <i>She</i> .....	6	4	10
132. Henrik Ibsen, <i>Ghosts</i> .....	3	7	10
133. Manuel Komroff, <i>Coronet</i> .....	9	1	10
134. Harold Lamb, <i>The Crusades</i> .....	6	4	10
135. D. H. Lawrence, <i>Sons and Lovers</i> .....	3	7	10
136. Somerset Maugham, <i>The Moon and Sixpence</i> .....	3	7	10
137. R. T. Morris, <i>Fifty Years a Surgeon</i> .....	3	7	10
138. Edward O'Brien, <i>The Best Short Stories, 1933-34</i> ...	3	7	10
139. Plato, <i>The Republic</i> .....	7	3	10
140. J. H. Randall, <i>The Making of the Modern Mind</i> ...	8	2	10
141. O. E. Rølvaag, <i>Giants in the Earth</i> .....	4	6	10
142. Rafael Sabatini, <i>Scaramouche</i> .....	8	2	10
143. Upton Sinclair, <i>The Jungle</i> .....	8	2	10
144. Leo Tolstoi, <i>Resurrection</i> .....	7	3	10
145. Stanley Walker, <i>City Editor</i> .....	9	1	10
146. Jakob Wassermann, <i>Gold</i> .....	2	8	10
147. Jakob Wassermann, <i>The Gooseman</i> .....	.....	10	10
148. P. G. Wodehouse, <i>Thank You, Jeeves</i> .....	7	3	10
149. F. B. Young, <i>White Ladies</i> .....	.....	10	10
150. Burns Mantle, <i>The Best Plays of 1934-35</i> .....	2	8	10
Total.....	1,137	1,590	2,727

As previously remarked the number of magazine readers is estimated at approximately half the population. Since 45 per cent of the people interviewed in this study reported that they read magazines regularly, it appears that library patrons in New York more or less conform to the national average. Of these, 19 per cent read one magazine, 15 per cent read two, 8 per cent read three, 3 per cent read four, and the remainder read more than four magazines. One-tenth of 1 per cent reported reading as many as nine magazines regularly.

Virtually no difference was shown in the gross consumption of magazines between men and women. The heaviest reading was reported by patrons between the ages of twenty and thirty, with a steady decline in the number of magazines read by people above that age. Among patrons with grade school training only, 72 per cent read no magazines regularly, in contrast to 56 per cent of the high-school-trained people and 48 per cent of the college-trained. In the occupations, professional folk reported the most magazine reading and unskilled laborers the least. Housewives and unskilled laborers reported less than other groups. Price and availability, as well as the horizon of interests, are important factors which enter into and explain the total picture.

The difference between the magazines read and those requested for inclusion in the subscription list of the library is revealed when the thousands of titles are distributed by subject category. In Table 9 all magazines read regularly and all magazines requested for purchase are expressed in per cent. In the last column the difference between the two is expressed by a plus or minus sign. Whenever the figure is minus it means that magazines of this type are

already available to readers either through the library or through outside sources, and that less desire is expressed for further inclusions. Thus, in the group of women's and home magazines which accounts for 0.2 per cent of all

TABLE 9  
MAGAZINES REQUESTED AND REPORTED READ—BY  
SUBJECT CATEGORIES

Category	Per Cent of All Magazines Requested	Per Cent of All Magazines Read	Difference between Per Cent Requested and Per Cent Read
1. Fine arts.....	6.0	3.5	+ 2.5
2. Business and trade.....	3.6	1.1	+ 2.5
3. Elite.....	3.2	10.1	- 6.9
4. Fiction.....	2.0	5.0	- 3.0
5. Foreign language.....	6.4	2.1	+ 4.3
6. Health and hygiene.....	1.8	0.9	+ 0.9
7. Juvenile.....	1.3	0.9	+ 0.4
8. Monthly and quarterly reviews.....	4.3	4.4	- 0.1
9. Weekly news.....	5.0	12.5	- 7.5
10. Popular science and mechanics..	5.0	4.8	+ 0.2
11. Professional.....	3.3	1.8	+ 1.5
12. Quality.....	2.5	7.8	- 5.3
13. Radio.....	2.5	0.4	+ 2.1
14. Digests.....	6.3	10.4	- 4.1
15. Religious.....	2.3	1.3	+ 1.0
16. Sport, outdoor, and hobby.....	5.8	1.3	+ 4.5
17. Women's and home.....	0.2	8.2	- 8.0
18. Liberal and radical.....	23.3	9.0	+ 14.3
19. All other.....	15.2	14.5	- 0.7
Total .....	100.0	100.0	.....

requests and 8.2 per cent of all magazines read regularly, there is a rating of -8 per cent. This indicates that libraries and readers are well supplied with this sort of periodical, and little general need is felt for branches to increase their present supply.

Ranking all the magazine groups which are preceded by a plus sign we get:

1. Liberal and radical magazines.....	14.3
2. Sport, outdoor, and hobby magazines.....	4.5
3. Foreign-language magazines.....	4.3
4. Fine arts magazines.....	2.5
5. Business and trade magazines.....	2.5
6. Radio magazines.....	2.1
7. Professional magazines.....	1.5
8. Religious magazines.....	1.0
9. Health and hygiene magazines.....	0.9
10. Juvenile magazines.....	0.4
11. Popular science and mechanics magazines...	0.2

The list gives in rank order the kinds of magazines which readers would like to see more widely represented in branch libraries. Since liberal and radical magazines are requested so much more frequently than they are reported read on the outside, a typical reader's comment is given to illustrate the point. The comment is from a tutor who says: "A very large per cent of your readers are interested in Marxism. Why not have more books and periodicals that deal with it? Of all the fields in which I have worked, including poetry, education, psychology, the novel, and the natural sciences, none is so inadequate as the Marxist. You should get the French and English Socialist and Communist periodicals in particular, since they are *too expensive and difficult for individuals to get.*"

Of all the individual titles requested, regardless of category, *New Masses* leads the field, with *Esquire* and *Fortune* following at a discreet distance. Religious magazines were demanded most often by Catholics who felt that Protestant periodicals were overrepresented; expensive sport, hobby, and arts magazines, and periodicals in foreign languages were widely requested by people who could not afford to buy them from the newsstand or by subscription.



The following list reverses the order, and ranks those magazine groups which have a minus sign before them:

- |                                       |      |
|---------------------------------------|------|
| 1. Women's and home magazines.....    | -8.0 |
| 2. Weekly news magazines.....         | -7.5 |
| 3. Elite magazines.....               | -6.9 |
| 4. Quality magazines.....             | -5.3 |
| 5. Digest magazines.....              | -4.1 |
| 6. Fiction magazines.....             | -3.0 |
| 7. Monthly and quarterly reviews..... | -0.1 |

This gives a ranked list of magazines which libraries are sufficiently supplying to their readers, or which readers readily obtain from other sources. Women's magazines are cheap, widely sold by subscription, and enjoy a large newsstand sale. *Time* and the *New Yorker* are included in most libraries or are easily obtained elsewhere. Likewise, *Harper's*, the *Atlantic*, *Forum*, etc., are generally standard equipment in most academic and public libraries.

Because it is meant to be no more than broadly descriptive and suggestive, this procedure probably has little immediate value to the book selector. But it is a highly interesting side light on public reading habits as expressed through magazine preferences. And it is a further indication of the obligation of book selection to seek a defensible middle way, through the maze of conflicting and minority demands, to the professional goal of the best reading for the most people at the least cost.

## CHAPTER VII

### WHAT PATRONS THINK OF THE PUBLIC LIBRARY

PSYCHOLOGICAL investigation, it is readily admitted, does not lend itself to so blunt an instrument as the social survey. What is obtained through this means is likely to be pure opinion rather than expression of basic attitudes. However, since the public's opinion of the various features of the library service offered was one of the primary curiosities motivating this study, every effort was made to encourage free, spontaneous criticism and to solicit readers' suggestions. Readers were asked, under the cover of anonymity, to point out the deficiencies of the library in comparison with more favored institutions; to evaluate the books, magazines, and newspapers in the library collection in terms of their own needs and desires; to speak their minds on the subject of the catalog; and to use the reverse side of questionnaires for the registering of complaints, suggestions, and comments on any phase of the service which seemed to them to be good or bad.

Over eleven thousand such commentaries were received, and distributed under the following headings: (1) books, owned or not owned by the library—6,897; (2) magazines, owned or not owned—1,060; (3) features of general service—2,386; (4) library buildings and equipment—423; and (5) personnel—256.

Comments on books and magazines and on the catalog have been discussed; and responses concerning personnel

related to branch personalities rather than to librarians as a whole. Likewise, comments on the branch library buildings, many of which are decorated in bleak institutional style and follow the old-fashioned plan of a first floor devoted to the circulating collection, second floor to children's room, and third floor to the reference room, without elevator service, are not applicable to the newer branches in New York or to library architecture in other cities. However, suggestions offered for the improvement of the service have implications which transcend locality and they, as well as the persons making them, deserve attention. All service suggestions have been tabulated in per cents in Table 10.

In examining some of the more significant suggestions typical comments from readers are employed because they tend to humanize the statistics and are more vivid than a mere recounting of the problem. Each comment is carefully chosen, not because it lauds the library, or is unique, or well expressed, but because it best typifies a group of similar comments.

*Improved visual aids and guides.*—The general desire for better visual guides in the use of the library has been brought out in other connections, particularly in relation to the catalog. Twenty per cent of all suggestions relate to this problem. Readers want more floor plans to guide them around the shelves; they want the shelves more plainly labeled, not only with the subject of the books but also with the Dewey numbers; and they want more graphic and better-displayed charts to initiate them into the mysteries of the catalog. Many echoed the comment of an interior decorator who said: "I always feel lost when I enter a library and poke my way around, ask questions, and try to find a place to sit down. If there was a plan of the

room showing location of cases and indicating what types of books they held—very clearly printed and well displayed—it would be a great help.” An elevator operator, past the fifty-year mark, suggested: “For the betterment

TABLE 10  
PATRONS' SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT OF  
LIBRARY SERVICE

Suggestions	Per Cent of Readers Making Suggestions
1. Improved visual aids and guides . . . . .	20.2
2. Libraries open longer hours . . . . .	10.1
3. Instalation of rental collections . . . . .	9.0
4. Revision of the charging system . . . . .	8.3
5. Expansion of the service . . . . .	7.7
6. Increase in length of loan period . . . . .	7.4
7. Open shelves—pro and con . . . . .	6.8
8. Elimination of the lower shelves . . . . .	5.5
9. Increase in number of loans allowed . . . . .	4.4
10. Censorship of books—pro and con . . . . .	4.1
11. Distribution of prepared booklists . . . . .	3.4
12. Exhibitions in branches . . . . .	3.2
13. Establishment of special collections—music, art, etc. . . . .	3.0
14. Lectures in branch libraries . . . . .	2.6
15. Publishers' blurbs and synopses pasted in books . . . . .	1.5
16. Improved bulletin boards . . . . .	0.9
17. Reader participation in book selection . . . . .	0.9
18. Restriction of library membership . . . . .	0.5
19. Delivery of books to homes . . . . .	0.5
Total . . . . .	100.0

of the service I would suggest that the public libraries familiarize readers with the numbers which govern various book classifications, either by printed information in their new book lists or by separate slips to be distributed at the librarian's desk; and also by putting small cards over each book section, showing, as nearly as possible, the number

and contents of that section. Some such system will, I think, facilitate the location of many books without interrupting traffic at the librarian's desk, and in the case of newcomers and casual visitors will at least enable them to locate books more easily and prevent delays in traffic in and out of the libraries."

*Hours of service.*—The depression measure of closing on certain days branches that do not come under the terms of the Carnegie grant brought forth vigorous complaint from the communities thus affected, especially from local teachers and students. "I find it a great inconvenience not to have access to the library on Wednesday," said a high school teacher. "Many of my pupils suffer great hardships because of this, for this branch is most obliging and renders vital service to the students." A young clerk: "With special reference to this branch, it is most unfortunate that it must be closed on Saturday nights. There are probably over a thousand college students in this neighborhood for whom Saturday evening is the most convenient time to visit the library. I speak from experience, as I attended City College in the evenings until last June while I was working at the same time during the day. I could not use the library myself but had to ask others to get the books for me. Needless to say, this arrangement was highly unsatisfactory." And a government employee commented: "I frankly think it's a shame that an institution of this type has to be on a curtailed basis, what with W.P.A. funds available for library construction. I think it more sensible that this money be used to keep the library open at all hours."

Requests that the reference rooms of the branches open earlier in the morning to accommodate students attending day schools, close later in the evenings to accommodate

night students, and remain open on Sundays, for the use of those who can come on no other day, were registered by many. One, a grocery clerk attending night courses, said: "I think the reference room should be kept open until ten o'clock at least once a week if at all possible. College students who either work or come home late find it impossible to finish their work by nine. At least during examination week the reference room should be kept open a little later."

*Rental collections.*—Suggestions that branches instal duplicate pay collections, to insure readers a fair opportunity of reading best sellers while they are current and their pages are clean, came mainly from students, professional people, housewives, and clerks and stenographers. They were registered equally by men and women. A business man remarked: "In Los Angeles the public library uses a rental system for the purchase of the latest books. There is a charge of five cents a week, and when the book has paid for itself, it is placed on the regular shelf. It enables the library to purchase additional books even if the budget is inadequate."

"It seems to me," said a W.P.A. worker, "that owing to the scarcity of new books and publications in this branch—which I assume to be due to a lack of funds—that a small rental charge for new books—ten cents a week—might help to make up the deficit in new books." Comments from many housewives expressed the same desire to obtain the current fiction at a rental price which is placed variously at from one to fifteen cents a week. The following, although dealing with the rental of magazines, expresses not only the sentiments of many housewives but also those of a certain class of readers which economic conditions brought to the public library for the first time

during the depression: "I have always borrowed books from Womrath's and have been delighted with the timeliness and newness of the books and the fact that they would order any book published. However, our income has now been cut off and we can no longer afford to pay sixty cents a week for the rental of two books and are trying the public library. Here the atmosphere is pleasant, but the reading matter is too old, unless one wants to reread the classics of one's youth; and the books and magazines are filthy to handle. It is necessary to wash one's hands after each reading. My suggestion is to make a small charge. I, and no doubt many others, would cheerfully pay five cents for the privilege of borrowing a new copy of *Harper's* or the *American Magazine*, to be returned within three days."

*Revision of the charging system.*—Suggestions on this score related to the fact that the New York Public Library stamps books with the date taken out rather than with the date due, a practice which seems to irritate some. Typical of the comments was one from a young man employed as a hat checker: "Coming from New Hampshire I was very much surprised to find the system used here for checking books was in many ways inferior to the one I had been accustomed to. I would suggest that instead of stamping the date on which the book is taken out, that the date on which the book should be brought back be stamped on the card." The single complaint which did not relate to the date-withdrawn system came from a bank clerk who urged the library to abolish the self-charging system, which, ironically, owes its inspiration to bank practices.

*Expansion of service.*—About 8 per cent of all recorded comments referred to the need for expanded service

through increased appropriations, more buildings and branches, and larger staffs. A greater part of the requests for new branches came from the Bronx, the northern part of which is served only by a book truck. "I think there should be a branch of the New York Public Library in the Westchester Square section of the Bronx," runs a typical comment from a physician. "The Huntington Free Library and reading room is a private library for reference purposes only. Books do not circulate, and it is open only from two to five daily except on Sunday and holidays. In addition its supply of books is limited. There really should be a library in that section. The Bronx Reference Center is too small and there are too many people after the same book. Often I have had books taken away from me before I had time to finish."

"And while I am remarking about the inadequate supply of everything," concluded an articulate housewife, "I might include librarians as well as books and periodicals."

*Increases in the loan period and in the number of loans permitted.*—As a depression measure, the number of loans allowed was decreased in March, 1933, from six to two. A few months' experience proved that the reduction had been too drastic, and in October of that year the number was increased from two to four. Requests that the number of loans be further increased and the loan period extended came from three types of readers: the teacher or research worker who needs many books for comparative reading, the busy reader who cannot get through the average six-to-eleven-hundred-page novel in a week or even two, and the fiction-eater who can curl up under a bed light and swallow two or three light novels in an evening.

"The inability to secure from the circulating library more than four books at one time is often inconveniencing



to someone engaged in a profession like myself," wrote a male social worker. "In wanting to follow through as many of the present-day concepts in sociology and psychology and to conduct special studies, I am hampered by lack of comparative reading. I would suggest that people who have little time to visit libraries and more time to do work after library hours be given the privilege of taking up to six or seven volumes."

A broker voiced the hardships which Hervey Allen's call for "more bulk" in modern literature has placed on the library patron: "I have great difficulty obtaining a book recently published, and after months of waiting for it I can only keep it a week, which is an unreasonable time for any person who is busy, and for a book like *Anthony Adverse*."

A housewife asked: "Could the children renew their books for a longer time? My daughter of twelve years loves reading but don't have very much time. Result is she will not take out a book with very much reading in it, as she worries in case she cannot finish it."

*Open shelves.*—A few readers who resent the mutilation of books containing plates and illustrations expressed their approval of the closed shelves. The majority resented them on the score that no one can estimate a book from looking at it through a glass pane, and that it is inconvenient to have to ask a staff member to unlock the case. "One cannot always tell whether a book is good or not by its name in the catalog," said a college student. "And it is often embarrassing to ask the librarian for half a dozen books on the closed shelves and then say they are inadequate."

Said a secretary: "I request that you allow the readers to browse through the books of reference at least one day

a week so that we can become acquainted with what the reference section has to offer. To me the library is a hobby where I can fondle forgotten tomes and scurry through bristling, wide-awake books and articles. I do wish the reading public had the privilege of browsing through that almost hidden section of the ——— branch, barred by a chain, which treasures many interesting volumes on biography, history, philosophy, science, etc. . . . You see, I do not have a definite objective in mind on each visit to the library. It doesn't do any good anyway. I invariably meet up with books much more interesting and forget my original intentions."

*Elimination of the lower shelves.*—Naturally, objections to the lower shelves came from older readers who were unwilling or unable to perform the contortions required to read the titles of books almost at floor level. One reader went so far as to mail the library an ingenious but impractical blueprint setting forth a way of dispensing entirely with the two lowest shelves. "I find the arrangement of the shelves very inconvenient," complained a fifty-year-old accountant. "You have to assume a crouching position as the lowest ones are only a few inches from the floor."

"Raise the shelves," advised a lawyer, "so that the top shelf meets the eye. Leave the two bottom shelves empty. In such a case, the books on the shelves above the bottom two will be more accessible to the eye and will circulate more often."

And a naval architect commented: "I find it impossible to read easily the titles of books on the two lowest shelves owing to the angle at which the light strikes the books. In order to see them it is necessary to bend low and tip the backs to about 25 or 30 degrees. It would help, I think, if the lower shelves could be tipped forward. Or

better still, omit the bottom row altogether, or else bring it forward and place the books with backs upward."

Likewise, a salesman commented that he "would like to suggest using the bottom shelves for bric-a-brac because it is too difficult to read the titles there without folding up like a disjointed marionette. I realize," he conceded, "that you are cramped for space, but can't *something* be done?" In answer to queries such as this, a housewife made the suggestion that flashlights be provided readers who must explore the gloom of the two lower shelves.

*Censorship.*—Censorship is always a live problem among librarians, and opinion from across the desk is interesting. Although few complaints are shown under this head in Table 10, hundreds were expressed in the course of written requests for more radical literature. Roughly 75 per cent of all such requests came from students, and the majority of the nonstudent requests from the Bronx and Chelsea sections of the city.

The principal of a private school remarked: "I was born and raised in New York City and have lived here all my life. I have come to look upon the branch public libraries as 'safe and sane' institutions, cautious enough in their selection of books and magazines to satisfy the debased and different tastes of a Hearst or an American Legion vigilante. I don't want to appear too captious myself, for the branch libraries perform a most useful service with all their limitations. But when I want books on social problems I go to the circulating libraries of one of the private agencies such as Womrath's, or else to one of the Workers' Bookshops in the city."

"I was very astonished and pleurably surprised," commented a W.P.A. worker, "to note the advent of liberalism in the public library; viz., the carrying of books dealing

with communism in its entirety, written by communists for a change."

A day laborer unconsciously defined the greatest problem of democracy when he said: "I want to see lots of books about Russia, but I don't think you ought to buy those which are prejudiced."

From the right side of the fence came many complaints. This from a traffic manager is typical: "I get most of my books from downtown because I find my neighborhood branch has too many books on socialism and communism."

Numerous complaints of censorship were received from astrologers and other cultists, and from readers who object to the profanity, taboo words, and cloacal vocabulary of naturalistic and realistic fiction; "The library needs a censor," said an elderly gentleman, "to eliminate books which contain vulgar, obscene, and lewd phrases, and blasphemy." Other readers object to the censoring of any book which has attained genuine critical acclaim. "Unquestionably, fine pieces of literature like Briffault's *Europa* should be in the library," contends a college instructor. "And they should not be subject to any kind of censorship because certain narrow-minded persons consider the book to have objectionable passages. After all, the library readers are adults, and no one was ever harmed by what he read. An eminent psychologist like Mr. Briffault would not and did not write his books to obtain commendation from the reader of purely pornographic works."

*Distribution of prepared book lists.*—Requests for printed bibliographies which readers can follow by themselves came from many different kinds of people. "I remember," a stenographer said, "that between the ages of twelve and sixteen I was always in doubt as to what suitable books to read. Since my friends and family did not read much in

English, I found myself hoping for a list of books to follow. Today, having had courses in English literature, I know what to read next; but can't a standard list be made up and passed out in public libraries, listing classic books of various ages?"

Several housewives complained that books which they had withdrawn for their husbands turned out to be too juvenile, and that a bibliography, listing books suitable for young, middle-aged, and elderly adults would be helpful. And a husband, employed as a doorman, said: "I not only borrow books that I read myself, but also take one out for my wife. I find it rather difficult to find novels which she would be interested in as I haven't sufficient time to look through the books but must make a stab in the dark and take a chance. If this can be remedied in any way, I would appreciate it a good deal."

"Put out a weekly comment sheet to help readers select from the array you have," suggested an unemployed man.

Since the survey was made, part-time advisory work in the branches has been undertaken in co-operation with the Office of the Readers' Adviser. In addition, a printed bibliography of standard literature has been arranged by the same office and is distributed on request.

Other suggestions for the improvement of service ran the gamut from requests that smoking be allowed those who cannot concentrate without tobacco to suggestions that the library restrict its membership to that part of the public which considers cleanliness to possess elements of godliness. Readers asked that books be delivered to homes via Western Union; that boxes be set up wherein the public can drop suggestions for new books; that branches provide weekly lecture series, and that librarians conduct regular classes in literary appreciation and use

of the library; that typewriters be installed, books be sold in libraries, and paper covers for dirty books be placed on sale at the desk. Many of the schemes suggested have been tried in the past or are in vogue in different branches of the Circulation Department or in libraries of other cities.

A great body of comments illustrated the intangible functions of the public library. Because of the great ethnic concentrations in New York, the problem of assimilating the foreign-born into the prevailing culture has always been of national importance. That the library has made positive contributions is attested by the experience of many foreign readers. Typical is the comment of a young foreigner engaged in carpentry: "I arrived in this country in 1926 and have always used the facilities of the library freely. Having attended school only a few weeks, I have obtained such knowledge of English as I possess almost entirely from books borrowed from the library."

A fifty-year-old immigrant from Germany, a pharmacist by profession, says: "The New York Public Library is the city's greatest institution for a poor person. To the writer it means the very life. In these times of radio mania one can at least get books on any subject to explain the American life and get free and kind treatment in the bargain."

"The most valuable single thing I have met with since my arrival in the United States fifteen years ago," thus a middle-aged correspondent for European newspapers characterizes the public library.

An English woman, employed as a beauty operator, comments: "I have belonged to the library ever since I came to New York twenty years ago, and I don't know what I would have done without it. In England they don't have any kind equal to the New York libraries—or they didn't in my younger days."

Not only have the libraries helped the foreign-born to adjust to new cultural patterns but they have played an important part in the lives of many who come to the city from other parts of the country. "I have only recently come to New York from a small town in southwest Louisiana," said a young freight agent, "where the library is very small and has practically ceased to function as a part of the community because of the depression. Therefore, this branch library is a picnic for a nontechnical or lay reader such as I am."

A young factory girl with little formal education said: "The library is a constant source of comfort and help to me, since I came from a city that was devoid of public libraries of any kind."

Although the concept of the public library as "the people's university" has fallen into disrepute as a smug cliché, for many readers it has been just that—a true university. "Virtually my alma mater," a housewife with a grade school background called it, continuing: "I regard it with extreme affection and would defend its right to continued existence with all the strength of a healthy pair of lungs and a fierce pen." Writing in a branch in a distant part of the city, a clerk who had gone through only the sixth grade, used the same descriptive phrase. "The public library has been my chief source of educational reading and has helped me to such an extent that it is not generally known that my formal education has been so little. I invariably mention the library as being my alma mater." "I received a great deal of my education from the public library," stated a lawyer; and a secretary added: "It is the foremost source of keeping up and furthering my knowledge, as I am unable to attend college."

Writers as a group were particularly extravagant in their praise of the library, and many recounted books which

had been written almost *in toto* through the aid of librarians. Other professional folk such as lawyers, dentists, actors, musicians, and doctors contributed similar testimonials of service well rendered. One physician mentioned a use of the library which is rather unique. He said: "I have quite often had the chance to send my clinic patients, suffering from nervous diseases, to the library. Here, the librarians have recommended to them special books either to help them overcome their nervous troubles or to give them opportunities for the development of their cultural education. I am happy and grateful that in such important instances I have always found invaluable and splendid co-operation."

Although chapter ii showed the decided decrease in library use after the end of the school period, hundreds of readers commented on the fact that school habits had been carried over into adult life. "I have belonged to the library since I first went to school," said a young woman clerk in a well-known department store. "I read a great many books, and all of them come from the public library."

"Throughout my school years I used the library not only for reference but also for enjoyment," commented a secretary many years out of college. "Since graduation I have depended on the New York Public Library for almost all my reading."

For people without access to other sources of literature and unable to afford expensive books and magazines, the library performs a vital function. "I personally find the library a very necessary part of my life," said a trained nurse, "for actually, I have hardly anywhere else from which to borrow books. I cannot conceive of the possibility of not reading."

"If we didn't have the library," said a housewife, "I



wouldn't ever be able to read a book. Any other way of getting books would either be too costly for me or would prove unsatisfactory due to limited quantity and limited types of books."

Another housewife related the same story, and incidentally furnished a thumbnail sketch of a reader's development through self-guidance in the library. "The public library is both a necessity and luxury as far as I am concerned. I cannot afford to buy books. I have also found out that there are other books beside the fiction which was my steady diet for many years until I joined the library. I then began picking out books from the shelves marked Literature, Travel, Philosophy, Religion, and a new world opened to me. It's true I pick at random, but I'm lucky, and I have found ever so much that has been of great value to me."

Lest publishers think that the library dulls the purchasing instinct of the public, a typical example of the opposite is furnished by a middle-aged furniture salesman: "The few books which I have been able to buy for home use and study—my income does not allow me to spend much outside of living expenses—I first became acquainted with in the New York Public Library."

The role of the library in easing the shock of economic disorganization has been noted elsewhere. A comment, typical of scores received, is illustrative. "I should like to add," said an unemployed man of forty, "that the library has been a godsend to me at times like the present when I am out of work and there is nothing else for me to do but read. I cannot make this too strong."

Among the thousands of comments which were received, many were from readers who took questionnaires home for more leisurely perusal. Wild praise and bitter

denunciation the library got aplenty, as well as requests for jobs, original literary compositions from cranks, and alarms from readers who feared the survey was an evil omen of straitened circumstances; but few readers objected outright to being questioned on their library habits and opinions. An exception was the lady who wrote in to say that "asking her age was entirely too pertinent [*sic!*] on the part of the library."

## CHAPTER VIII

### SUMMARY

**C**ONTRARY to the established pattern, this study has no recommendations to offer. Inspired by the curiosity of one librarian, and achieved through the curiosity of others, it has sought only to give satisfactory answers to a few questions concerning readers and their relations with the public library. By using the many it has tried to identify the average and has attempted to push the definition beyond the limitations of personal contact and individual experience. This chapter, therefore, in lieu of the customary list of conclusions and recommendations, is a brief restatement of the more significant highlights which the survey brought more clearly into focus.

In chapter i the lack of a professional documentation to serve as a bridge between library science and general social science and the significant omission of the library from *Recent Social Trends* were offered as justification for studies which have no immediate practical utility. The survey as a means of gathering social data was discussed, internal evidences of the validity of the method were cited, and the necessity of approaching a body of social material from the standpoint of the group concept was stressed.

Chapter ii, dealing with the social characteristics of readers, revealed that a cross-section of library patrons is not a true cross-section of the general population. In the Circulation Department 65 per cent of the readers were be-

low the age of twenty, and almost 80 per cent were below the age of thirty. However, in the Reference Department, where younger readers are generally prohibited, the age range of patrons conformed to the normal age range of the total population up to the age of fifty. Students were found to average 45 per cent of the patronage of public libraries in three representative cities; however, the student group in New York was found to be somewhat smaller than in South Chicago, Illinois, or St. Louis, Missouri.

Men outnumbered women in the use of public libraries in New York. Fifty-five per cent of the branch patrons, and over 80 per cent of the visitors to the Reference Department were men. Samples made over a period of six years showed men to be consistently better represented than women, although ratios differed widely among individual branches.

Students formed the largest single group using the branch libraries, professional people the largest group using the Reference Department. Clerks and stenographers were the second largest group using both departments. Housewives, an important group in branch work, were insignificant in the Reference Department. And it was indicated that the less urban the community, the more housewives will figure in the total number of patrons served by a library. Skilled tradesmen and unskilled laborers were everywhere underrepresented among library patrons in proportion to their numbers in the general population.

In chapter iii it was shown that over half of the patrons came to the library with no specific objectives in mind. A large number of these readers requested that more and better visual aids such as floor plans, charts, labeled shelves, and other printed guides be made available. A

fourth of all the readers using branch libraries during one week engaged in some sort of reference work. Likewise, a quarter of all readers required some form of oral aid in using the library. Women used the circulating features more than men and did less reference work. It was impossible to count the number of women borrowers using the library in behalf of male relatives, but voluntary information from readers revealed it to be a common practice.

The complexity of the things people do in the library is closely related to the amount of schooling they have had, their age, and their occupation. Those who used the library as a reading room differed considerably from those who used it as a circulation agency, and from those who used it as an intelligence bureau, an aid to research, or a supplementary source for obtaining uncommon, expensive, or ultracurrent materials. When described in statistical generalities, these three types of readers symbolize three rather distinct publics with which the librarian must deal.

Half of the readers using the branches during one week found what they wanted. A third partially fulfilled their needs, and the rest failed entirely. Satisfactory use was seen to be directly conditioned both by the complexity of the demands made and by characteristics inherent in the readers. Women found what they wanted more often than men; better educated people were inclined to tax the resources more than the less educated and, consequently, encountered more dissatisfaction. However, the best-trained readers were better able to adapt related materials satisfactorily. Borrowers who came to the library with definite objectives reported a higher degree of satisfactory use than did those who selected books at random.

The greatest amount of dissatisfaction was caused by

the inability of the library to duplicate its present book stock in sufficient numbers. The next greatest cause was the failure of the library to purchase titles not currently held. Specified titles requested for purchases were chiefly books needed for collateral school work, left-wing literature, action, love, and mystery stories of doubtful literary quality, and current novels exploiting taboo subjects. Among magazine titles requested for purchase, liberal and radical magazines, sport, outdoor, and hobby magazines, and magazines in foreign languages were most generally suggested.

In the Reference Department the majority of the readers were found to be engaged in independent study; the second largest number were reading for vocational purposes; and the fewest were reading for entertainment and recreation. Compared with previous years, independent study as a motivation of library use seems to be on the increase, with a corresponding decline in the amount of reading done for recreation. Seventy-six per cent of the readers questioned in 1934 and 1936 described themselves as regular visitors. In both years, over 40 per cent said they had required assistance from a staff member in using the library.

In chapter iv it was shown that a third of the regular borrowers claimed to visit the library as frequently as once a week, and that many living near neighborhood branches visited even oftener. Forty-seven per cent visited the library every two weeks, and 20 per cent at least once a month. The rate at which patrons visited the library was closely associated with their occupational and educational status, and with the sort of activities they engaged in within the library walls.

Chapter v showed that in one week 37 per cent of the patrons visiting branch libraries did not resort to the cata-

log for help. A tenth of these readers who did not use the catalog failed to find what they wanted in the library. Six per cent of the total number of borrowers stated that they had never used the catalog for any purpose. In the Reference Department 7 per cent of all readers reported difficulty in using this tool. Among branch patrons who have never used the catalog there was a predominance of housewives, unskilled laborers, skilled tradesmen, and unemployed persons, and correspondingly few business people, clerks, stenographers, professional people, and students. Not the catalog itself, but how to locate books after they had been found in the catalog presented the greatest problem to readers.

In chapter vi it was seen that almost half the readers reported using the public library as a source of books read during a two-month span. Twenty-four per cent had used academic libraries; 12 per cent had borrowed from friends and relatives; 8 per cent had used bookstores; 5 per cent, rental libraries; and 2 per cent, the libraries of clubs and organizations. Less than 1 per cent had used either home or church collections. The public library was named the primary book source used by three-fourths of the borrowers, and academic libraries the primary source of 15 per cent more. Rental libraries, friends, and bookstores were the primary sources used by the remaining readers. Home collections were shown to be used heavily in rural areas and little in cities.

According to the questionnaires, sixty-five hundred books were reported read from all sources within the week previous to the survey. Forty-five per cent of the patrons claimed to read at least one magazine with regularity, a figure which conforms roughly to the estimated national average.

In their suggestions for improvement of the library service, discussed in chapter vii, the greatest number asked that visual guides be more widely used in libraries and that existing ones be improved. Hundreds of patrons requested the elimination of such depression measures as the closing of non-Carnegie branches during certain hours and the reduction in the number of loans allowed a borrower, and requested the extension of service to areas without permanent libraries and the expansion of service in areas now served.

In the anonymous, voluntary, interview material collected by the survey some of the more significant public services rendered by libraries were described: namely, helping foreigners adjust themselves to the conditions of American life; ministering to the reading needs of those unable to purchase literature for themselves; helping to cushion the shock of depression; providing the educational means of acquiring the equivalent of a formal academic background; serving as an organized agency for the promotion of the adult education movement, and others.

So ends our exploration of the curiosities arising in the Director's mind as he walked through the crowded reading room one dreary winter day. The record closes with the hope that such curiosity is contagious and that it will spread ever wider until the time when librarianship will find itself possessed of that saga of curiosity which men call science.



## APPENDIX

### A NOTE ON METHOD

The data on which the survey of the patrons of the New York Public Library is based were collected by means of the two questionnaires reproduced in Figures 9 and 10. The construction of both was an evolutionary process, beginning with a small trial form distributed early in 1934 which served as a model for a more detailed form used later in the same year to survey patrons in the divisions of the Reference Department and patrons of twelve of the branch libraries. The returns from this study made it evident that a form useful in surveying a large reference collection was unsatisfactory when extended to include branches of a popular circulating library. Accordingly, two separate questionnaires were prepared for purposes of the present study. The form used in the Reference Department (Fig. 9) was devised by Mr. Charles F. McCombs, Superintendent of the Main Reading Room, and members of his staff, with the assistance of Dr. C. C. Williamson, Dean of the Columbia School of Library Service. It incorporates the experience of the previous studies with significant additions. The form used in the Circulation Department (Fig. 10) is the result of collaborative effort on the part of the Readers' Adviser and the members of the administrative staff of the Circulation Department, members of the staff of the American Association for Adult Education, Dr. Douglas Waples, Dr. Leon Carnovsky, Dr. E. A. Wight, and the writer. A form book of questionnaires which had been successfully used in community, social service, sociological, and library surveys was compiled and was used consistently for suggestions and comparison.

THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY  
REFERENCE DEPARTMENT  
FIFTH AVENUE AND FORTY-SECOND STREET  
NEW YORK CITY

The Library wishes to learn how closely its books and service meet the needs of readers, and, to this end, will be grateful if you will check [✓] this slip to indicate your answers.

1. When you came to the Library today:
  - a. Did you wish to consult any particular book, the author or title of which you knew?    Yes ☐    No ☐
  - b. Did you wish to obtain information on a certain subject, not knowing in what books to find it?    Yes ☐    No ☐
2. Was this reading done for:
  - a. Recreation?    Yes ☐    No ☐
  - b. Your daily work, or business?    Yes ☐    No ☐
  - c. School or college study?    Yes ☐    No ☐
  - d. Independent study?    Yes ☐    No ☐
3.
  - a. Did you obtain the book wanted (See 1a)?    Yes ☐    No ☐
  - b. Did you obtain the information wanted (See 1b)?  
Yes ☐    No ☐
  - c. Did the Library possess the book wanted?    Yes ☐    No ☐
  - d. Did you have any difficulty in using the catalogue?  
Yes ☐    No ☐
4. DID YOU ASK A LIBRARIAN FOR ASSISTANCE?  
Yes ☐    No ☐
5.
  - a. Do you use the Library regularly?    Yes ☐    No ☐
  - b. Was this your first visit?    Yes ☐    No ☐
6. What subject were you investigating?  
(Answer in general terms, e.g., psychology, accounting, European history, American literature, etc.).....
7. If you had difficulties in using the catalogues, or in obtaining the books or information wanted, can you suggest any practicable means by which those difficulties might be lessened?.....

The other side of this slip may be used for any comments or suggestions you care to make.

\*   \*   \*

It would help to interpret your answers to these questions, if you would be willing to supply the following facts:

Sex..... Age..... Occupation.....  
Education.....

*When checked, please deposit this in the box provided*

FIG. 9.—Questionnaire used in Reference Department

## THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

## CIRCULATION DEPARTMENT

The Library is trying to improve its services to the public, and to discover how much its readers depend on other sources for books and magazines. It will therefore be grateful if you will check [✓] the following questions and leave this at the desk.

1. Please check this list below to show where you have obtained books in the last two months.

*a.* Public library ☐ *b.* Stores (purchase) ☐ *c.* School or college library ☐ *d.* Rental libraries ☐ *e.* Other libraries, such as church ☐ or clubs ☐ *f.* Friends ☐ *g.* Book clubs ☐ *h.* Any other sources (tell which).....

Now go over the list again, writing *1* after the source you used *most* often, and *2* after the source used *next* often.

- i.* What libraries in addition to The New York Public Library have you used?.....
- j.* Can you name helpful features in other libraries not found in The New York Public Library?.....

2. Do you visit this library:

*a.* At least once a week? ☐ *b.* At least once every two weeks? ☐  
*c.* About once a month? ☐ *d.* Less often than once a month? ☐  
 Is this your first visit? Yes ☐ No ☐

3. What did you do in the library TODAY? (Please check *all* the things you did.)

*a.* Read: a newspaper ☐ magazine ☐ book ☐  
*b.* Took out a book or books you had in mind before you came to the library ☐  
*c.* Found a book or books on the shelves after you got here ☐  
*d.* Consulted one or more reference books, such as the dictionary, atlas, encyclopedia, directories, etc. ☐  
*e.* Got desired information from an assistant in the library ☐  
*f.* Anything else (write it out).....

4. Did you find what you wanted? Yes ☐ Partly ☐ No ☐

5. If not, was it because:

*a.* The library does not own the book ☐ magazine ☐ or newspaper ☐

[Continued on following page]

## WHO USES THE PUBLIC LIBRARY

- b. The book ☐ magazine ☐ or newspaper ☐ was out  
 c. The books you found were inadequate ☐  
 d. The assistant could not answer your question ☐

If you find the library lacking in certain books or kinds of books or magazines in any language, please state what as definitely as you can.....  
 .....

6. Did you use the card catalogue? Yes ☐ No ☐  
 Have you ever used it? Yes ☐ No ☐  
 7. If you found the catalogue hard to use, please tell why.....  
 .....  
 8. What magazines or newspapers in any language do you read regularly?.....  
 .....  
 9. What magazines or books have you bought recently?.....  
 .....  
 10. What magazines or books did you *read* last week? If you read any, please list all you read, whether they came from the public library or not.....  
 .....

(If you need more space, write on the back of this sheet)

\* \* \*

The following facts will help us to use the above information to better advantage:

Your sex.....	Check the age group in which you belong:		
How far did you go in school?	15-19 <input type="checkbox"/>	30-34 <input type="checkbox"/>	45-49 <input type="checkbox"/>
.....	20-24 <input type="checkbox"/>	35-39 <input type="checkbox"/>	50-54 <input type="checkbox"/>
Your present occupation.....	25-29 <input type="checkbox"/>	40-44 <input type="checkbox"/>	55-59 <input type="checkbox"/>
.....			60 and over <input type="checkbox"/>

\* \* \*

*If you wish to make any further comments or suggestions, please write them on the other side of this sheet.*

THANK YOU

FIG. 10.—Questionnaire used in Circulation Department

At first it was feared that the questionnaire was too long to hold the attention of the person filling it out, but when the librarian of New Rochelle offered her library as a testing field, the public response encouraged the use of the form in its entirety, except for a few minor alterations. The Reference form had already received a trial in the earlier study.

Following the Director's approval of the two forms, posters were displayed a week or two in advance in the branches and Divisions, stating:

WHAT IS THE LIBRARY'S BATTLING AVERAGE?

During the week of January 13-16, the Library plans to make a detailed study of the way it meets or fails to meet the needs of the public. Readers will be given a printed list of questions and the Library hopes the answers will benefit both readers and staff. It appeals to the readers for their kindly interest.

To insure absolute coverage, fifty thousand forms were printed for the branches and ten thousand for the divisions of the Reference Department. Under an expense grant from the American Association for Adult Education, the writer went to New York to assist in the supervision of the survey. Branch librarians, heads of divisions, and administrative heads met for a last-minute conference on details. It was decided that the survey should be conducted in every division of the Reference Department directly serving the public except the Manuscript, Prints, and Oriental Divisions, and the Reserve and Map Rooms; and in every branch of the Circulation Department except the Library for the Blind. The subbranch in the new Columbia University Library building participated in the study at the request of its librarian.

Throughout the entire system the procedure for distributing the questionnaires was the same. Readers were

given blanks as they came to the charging desk; in some cases special tables were set aside for filling out the forms. For a week in the Reference Department, and for eight days in the branches, the distribution, checking, and collecting was carried on. The inequality in the time span was necessitated by the rigors of the January week, which brought a blizzard, suspension of electric power in some sections of the city, and the closure of public buildings thus affected.

A total of almost twenty thousand library patrons was reached, an astonishingly wide response to a study of this nature and to a form as detailed as the one used in the branches. It is no slight tribute to an institution that it can enlist the interest of its patrons to the extent that thousands were willing to sacrifice part of a crowded lunch hour to check the questionnaire and that scores took blanks home and returned them by mail, frequently typed. Such co-operation is doubtless due in part to the fact that the library symbolizes public service and has made few overt demands upon its patrons.

Total returns, by branches and divisions, are given in Table 11.

To thresh the bumper crop of data application for funds was made through the Chief of the Circulation Department to the Carnegie Corporation of New York. A generous grant enabled us to proceed immediately with the analysis. The Graduate Library School assumed responsibility for supervision of the study and staff and provided office space and statistical facilities.

The less complicated returns from the Reference Department were tabulated by hand by a corps of trained clerks. The more numerous and complex Circulation Department returns were coded and run on Hollerith machines. For the benefit of those unfamiliar with this process, it might be well to explain that the Hollerith machine

TABLE 11

TOTAL NUMBER OF PATRONS REPORTING BY  
BRANCHES AND DIVISIONS

## CIRCULATION DEPARTMENT

## Manhattan

Aguilar.....	235	Music Library.....	112
Bloomingdale.....	286	96th Street.....	165
George Bruce.....	214	Ottendorfer.....	157
Chatham Square.....	117	Riverside.....	164
Cathedral.....	117	Rivington Street.....	399
Central Circulation.....	1,305	St. Agnes.....	318
Columbus.....	57	Seward Park.....	648
Epiphany.....	127	St. Gabriel's Park.....	146
58th Street.....	312	67th Street.....	52
Fort Washington.....	1,127	Tompkins Square.....	464
125th Street.....	85	Washington Heights.....	568
Hamilton Fish Park.....	202	Webster.....	51
Hamilton Grange.....	131	West 40th Street.....	203
Harlem.....	132	Yorkville.....	521
Hudson Park.....	164	Columbia (sub).....	299
135th Street.....	75	Picture Collection.....	22
115th Street.....	318		
Jackson Square.....	313	Total Manhattan	
Muhlenberg.....	232	branches.....	9,838

## The Bronx

Fordham.....	1,472	Mott Haven.....	452
Bronx Reference Center..	229	Morrisania.....	805
High Bridge.....	496	Tremont.....	475
Hunt's Point.....	971	Woodstock.....	992
Kingsbridge.....	153		
Melrose.....	155	Total Bronx branches	6,200

## Richmond

West New Brighton.....	77	Tottenville.....	37
Port Richmond.....	56		
St. George.....	227	Total Richmond	
Stapleton.....	105	branches.....	502

Grand total, Circulation Department.....16,540

## REFERENCE DEPARTMENT

Art Division.....	190	Economics Division.....	189
Slavonic Division.....	92	Periodicals Division.....	593
Jewish Division.....	98	Main Reading Room (In-	
Music Division.....	79	cludes American History	
Science and Technology		and Genealogy).....	1,298
Room 117.....	158		
Room 121.....	130	Grand total Reference	
Chemistry.....	197	Department.....	3,055
Patents.....	31		

Grand total both departments.....19,595

is a device which grew out of the needs of the Census Bureau for a mechanical tabulator to deal with the staggering amount of data collected decennially. In this process items on questionnaires are reduced to numbered codes and transferred to punched cards by skilled operators. The punched cards are then run through machines which mechanically sort and count whatever item on the coded card is desired. It is a method commonly used by stock exchanges, banks, factories, schools, etc. Such libraries as the Library of the University of Texas use the machines to replace the hand labor involved in desk routines; and a subcommittee of the American Library Association Committee on Library Administration is currently studying the applicability of the machine to general library work.<sup>2</sup>

With the returns from both departments reduced to tables, there followed the long and tedious task of statistical analysis and the preparation of a report to the Director.

In handling the many diverse occupations reported by readers it was necessary to use a scheme which had meaning, but was terse enough for brief description. The Census classification is far too unwieldy for general use. The framework used in this study distributes occupations in such a way as to make a broad definition of the intelligence and training inherent in the occupation and of its social and economic position. Although it appears to border on oversimplification, the classification has been employed with success in a number of community studies and has attained a measure of standardization. In it, specific occupations are relegated to one of nine headings—students, housewives, clerks and stenographers, shopkeepers and salesmen, professionals, skilled tradesmen, unskilled labor-

<sup>2</sup> For a full discussion of this method see R. H. Parker, "The Punched Card Method in Circulation Work," *Library Journal*, LXI (1936), 903-5; E. A. Wight, "Methods and Techniques of Library Surveys," in L. R. Wilson, ed., *Library Trends*, pp. 344-60.



ers, unemployed, and unknown. As an illustration of the types of occupation falling under each, the following examples are given:

## SHOPKEEPERS AND SALESMEN

Brokers	Insurance salesmen
Businessmen—general	Merchants
Buyers	Proprietors
Florists	Salespeople, etc.
Grocers	

## SKILLED TRADESMEN

Bakers	Furriers
Barbers	Hairdressers
Brewers	Milliners
Butchers	Painters—house
Carpenters	Printers
Dressmakers	Tailors
Firemen	Toolmakers, etc.

## PROFESSIONALS

Actors	Lecturers
Actuaries	Librarians
Architects	Musicians
Attorneys	Publishers
Bankers	Sculptors
Chemists	Social service workers
Clergymen	Statisticians
Dentists	Teachers
Designers	Writers, etc.
Doctors	

## UNSKILLED LABORERS

Bellboys	Guards
Bus boys or girls	Housemaids
Chauffeurs	Messengers
Checkers	Nurses—untrained
Cooks	Porters
Domestics	Trucksters
Doormen	Waiters
Day laborers	Washerwomen, etc.
Expressmen	

It might be well to extend a few cautions to those who contemplate future surveys. The first consideration is that the investigator have well in mind the purposes to be served by the study. Even before the method is determined, there should be a full statement of the areas to be explored, the assumptions underlying the investigations, and the criteria to be employed. After this should come an understanding of the limitations of the method chosen. There are many excellent books which discuss the different approaches to social research, among which are Odum and Jocher, *Introduction to Social Research*, and Charles Luther Fry, *The Technique of Social Investigation*.<sup>2</sup> Of particular interest to the investigator in library science is the article "The Relation of Subject Interests to Actual Reading," by Douglas Waples in the *Library Quarterly* for January, 1932, which sets forth the weakness and strength of the several methods as they apply to reading studies.

If the data are to be collected through a questionnaire or schedule, the arrangement and phraseology of these are of crucial importance. A questionnaire must never expect the impossible and must always aim at the lowest level of comprehension in the group to be sampled. Difficult mnemonic questions and questions which require an undue amount of writing should be avoided. The tone of the questionnaire should be courteous, without pleading, and personal, without seeming too intimate or condescending. The preliminary form should first be tried on individuals to be sure that no errors of logic or phrasing have been committed and that all terms are common and familiar. Next it should be submitted to public trial. This step is indispensable, for an error in construction can denigrate

<sup>2</sup> (New York and London: Harper, 1934).

the value of the whole study. To cite an example of the importance of terms, in the returns from the questionnaire used in the Reference Department in 1934 there were a discouraging number of readers who failed to reply to the question relative to the catalog. However, by changing the question to read "card catalog," the response to the second questionnaire was more than tripled. Evidently readers are accustomed to thinking of it in this manner, and the unqualified word connotes a bound volume or the product of a mail-order house.

When a system of circulating libraries is to be surveyed, there is always the question of the number of forms to be distributed to each station of service. A simple method of calculating the number required for a reliable sample is to take the combined circulation figures and compute the percentage each branch contributes to the total. Thus if branch *x* accounts for 10 per cent of the circulation, it should receive 10 per cent of the questionnaires.

In no case should any questionnaire, much less the ones shown here, be used as a model without adaptation to conditions of local service and community traits.

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